



NOAA FISHERIES

Sustainable
Fisheries

This summary provides a broad overview of restrictions and requirements; the regulations summarized here may be found at 50 CFR part 648. Please contact the Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9315 for more information.

Updated September 18, 2014

Commercial Black Sea Bass Information Sheet

The Northern Region black sea bass fishery in the U.S. operates from Maine to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina (35° 15.3'N. latitude). The fishing year is January 1 through December 31. Black sea bass are managed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Individual states may set different regulations than those in place for Federal waters. Information on the black sea bass recreational fishery can be found on a separate information sheet.

What Federal permits are available for black sea bass?

There are two categories of black sea bass vessel permits:

- **Moratorium Permit** – you must have this permit to sell any amount of black sea bass; and
- **Charter/Party Permit** – you must have this permit if carrying passengers for hire (see the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Charter/Party and Recreational Information Sheet).

You do not need a black sea bass moratorium permit if no sale of black sea bass occurs and the vessel adheres to the established recreational possession limits. If you have both a black sea bass moratorium permit and a charter/party permit, you may not fish under the terms of both permits at the same time. That is, you may not carry passengers for hire and sell black sea bass on the same trip.

What is the minimum fish size?

For black sea bass moratorium permit holders, the minimum size is 11 inches total length. The total length is the straight-line distance from the tip of the snout to the end of the tail while the fish is lying on its side (Figure 1). Note: filament/tail extension is NOT included in total length measurement.

How is the commercial quota determined and monitored?

An annual commercial quota is established by NMFS based on the recommendations of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The quota is applied coastwide;

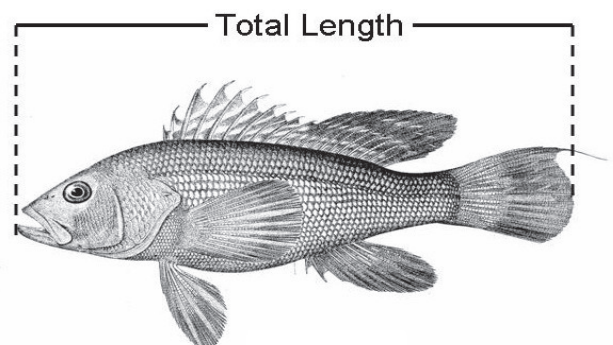


Figure 1. Black sea bass total length.

all black sea bass landed for sale are applied against the quota, regardless of where they are harvested. Up to 3 percent of the quota may be set aside for research purposes.

NMFS monitors the harvest of the commercial black sea bass quota and closes Federal waters to commercial black sea bass fishing when the quota has been harvested. Weekly landings reports are available at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/aps/monitoring/blackseabass.html>.

What are the gear requirements?

Otter trawl – Vessels with a black sea bass moratorium permit that land more than 500 lb of black sea bass per trip from January 1 through March 31, or 100 lb of black sea bass per trip from April 1 through December 31, must fish with nets that have a minimum mesh size of 4.5-inch diamond mesh applied throughout the codend for at least 75 continuous meshes forward of the end of the net. For codends with less than 75 meshes, the entire net must have a minimum mesh size of 4.5-inch diamond mesh throughout. Black sea bass must be stored so as to be readily available for inspection in a standard 100-lb tote.

Roller gear – A fishing vessel shall not use roller rig trawl gear with rollers greater than 18 inches in diameter.

Pots and traps – Black sea bass pots must have ghost panels (measuring 3 inches by 6 inches), degradable hinges, two escape vents in the parlor, and identification, as follows:

- Degradable hinges made with:
 - Untreated hemp, jute, or cotton string of 3/16-inch diameter or smaller; or
 - Magnesium alloy, pop-up devices or similar magnesium alloy fasteners; or

- Ungalvanized or uncoated iron wire or 0.094-inch diameter or smaller.
- Escape vents:
 - Rectangular vents measuring 1 3/8 inches by 5 3/4 inches; or
 - Circular vents measuring 2.5 inches in diameter; or
 - Square vents with sides of 2 inches, inside measure; or
 - Spaces of at least 1 3/8 inches between two sets of wooden laths.
- Identification:
 - Marked with state registration number; and/or
 - Marked with U.S. Coast Guard documentation number.

What is the possession limit?

Possession of more than the recreational possession limit is only allowed for vessels that have a black sea bass moratorium permit. There is no possession limit for black sea bass moratorium permit holders, but check with your state to determine the state possession limit for black sea bass. Only vessels with a black sea bass moratorium permit are allowed to sell black sea bass. Also, see the gear requirements for otter trawls above.

What are the reporting requirements?

You need to maintain on board the vessel and submit an accurate Federal fishing vessel trip report (VTR) for all fishing trips (regardless of species retained). Instructions for completing the VTR can be found at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/ro/fso/vtr.htm>. VTRs must be received by NMFS or postmarked within 15 days after the end of the reporting month. Copies of VTRs must be retained on board the vessel for 1 year after the date of the last entry on the log.

If no fishing activity took place during a fishing month, then a VTR must be submitted stating that no fishing trips

were taken (referred to as a 'Did Not Fish' (DNF) VTR). DNF VTRs may be submitted electronically up to 3 months in advance on the 'Fish-On-Line' website at: <https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/apps/login/login>.

If a party or charter boat owner is issued only a black sea bass charter/party permit, and is carrying passengers for hire, then he/she must complete a VTR for each trip on which black sea bass are landed.

Any change in the permit information such as vessel name, vessel owner, address, etc., must be submitted in writing to NMFS within 15 days of the change, or the permit is void.

All federally permitted seafood dealers are required to submit trip-level reports to NMFS via computer, using one of the approved electronic means, unless otherwise directed by the Regional Administrator. For more information on dealer reporting, please call the dealer electronic reporting help desk at (978) 281-9212 or contact your local NMFS Field Office: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sed/portagents/index.html>.

How can I get a black sea bass moratorium permit?

The commercial black sea bass sector operates on a limited entry system. Therefore, to be eligible for a moratorium permit for black sea bass, a vessel must have been issued a moratorium permit in the previous year, or be replacing a vessel that was issued a moratorium permit for the previous year. No one may apply for a black sea bass moratorium permit for a vessel after the owner retires the vessel from the fishery. All moratorium permits must be issued on an annual basis by the last day of the fishing year for which the permit is required, unless a Confirmation of Permit History has been issued. Failure to renew a moratorium permit in any fishing year bars the renewal of the permit in future years.