



CCA Angler’s Guide to Amendment 7 for Striped Bass

Update - May 2021

On Wednesday May 5th, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Striped Bass Management Board met via webinar to review the public comments on Amendment 7 and decide what components of the document will move forward for further development.

Based on the current schedule, a Plan Development Team (PDT) will work prepare another draft document for the board to consider for release to the public in October 2021 for a Nov. 2021-Jan 2022 public comment period. This period will be a second opportunity for the public to provide input and shape the final components of the Amendment.

Note: The timeline is subject to change per the direction of the Board.

August 2020	Board initiates development of Amendment 7
February 2021	Board approves PID for public comment
February - April 2021	Public comment on PID
→ May 2021	Board reviews public comment and AP report; directs Plan Development Team to develop Draft Amendment
May - September 2021	Preparation of Draft Amendment
October 2021	Board reviews Draft Amendment and considers approving for public comment
November 2021- January 2022	Public comment on Draft Amendment
February 2022	Board reviews public comment and selects final measures for the Amendment; Policy Board and Commission approve the Amendment
Summer-Fall 2022	Stock assessment update

Recreational release mortality, conservation equivalency, management triggers and measures to protect the 2015 year class will remain as the focus of the draft amendment.

Changes in fishery goals & objectives, biological reference points, stock rebuilding target & schedule, regional management, recreational accountability, and coastal commercial quota reallocation were removed from the draft amendment.

Below, you will find an updated version of the CCA Angler’s Guide to Amendment 7 including the original description of components that may have been removed from consideration. If an item is listed as removed, it means that the current measures in Amendment 6 will be maintained moving forward.

Based on the current schedule, no coast wide changes in fishery regulations are expected until the 2023 fishing season unless states choose to change their existing fishery prior to the completion of Amendment 7. Any changes will have to be consistent with existing measures or more conservative.

Draft Amendment 7 Topics & May 5th, 2021 Striped Bass Management Board Actions:

- 1. ~~Fishery Goals and Objectives~~ – REMOVED FROM DRAFT AM. 7 – No additional concepts will be developed by the PDT and the goals and objectives from Amendment 6 will be carried over.**

ACTION: Move to remove issue 1 from the PID and maintain existing goals and objectives. Motion made by Mr. White and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion carries (10 in favor, 6 opposed).

Original Anglers Guide Text:

This is the portion of the management plan that guides the decisions made to manage the striped bass fishery. Goals and Objectives should reflect the answer(s) to the question of, “what do you want the fishery to look like?”

The current fishery Goals and Objectives are listed on pages 4 and 5 of the [PID](#), and provide a good path forward for this fishery.

CCA Recommendations

- Manage striped bass as primarily a recreational fishery, which means manage them for increased abundance and age structure.
- Balance the needs of catch and release anglers with those who like to take a fish home.
- Stabilize the fishery with regulatory consistency across space and time.

- 2. ~~Biological Reference Points (BRPs)~~ : REMOVED FROM DRAFT AM. 7 – The existing Biological Reference Points will be maintained at this time.**

ACTION: Move to remove issue 2, biological reference points, from consideration for Draft Amendment 7. Motion made by Mr. Sikorski and seconded by Ms. Ware. Motion passes (10 in favor, 6 opposed).

Original Anglers Guide Text:

These are the goalposts that are used to evaluate the status of the population and indicate when a management change needs to occur. Currently, the spawning stock biomass (SSB) reference point is based on the level of the SSB in 1995, the year striped bass population was declared recovered. The fishing mortality reference point is the fishing mortality rate that on average

would maintain that SSB. An important point here is that the SSB reference point was not generated from the stock assessment, as is the case with most reference points.

Reference points are defined as a target and a threshold and are used to measure population goals for the overall biomass of spawning fish, and to set the goals and boundaries for fishing mortality. This could be explained as a target being the lane you want to drive in on a highway and the threshold being the edge of the road. If you're in your lane you are in good shape, but as when you hit the rumble strips, it's time to react before ending up in the ditch, or in the case of striped bass below the biomass threshold. The fishing mortality threshold is a ceiling you do not want to go above.

The primary question asked here is this: are the reference points adequate to achieve the fishery goals and objectives or should they be changed?

CCA Recommendations

- Keep the current reference points in place. Addendum VI implemented an 18 percent reduction in fishing mortality intended to end overfishing.
- Those measures were put in place in 2020 and managers have not had a chance to determine if they were effective. Thus, it would be pre-mature to change reference points at this time.
- Focus on maintaining fishing mortality to rebuild the stock and avoid future declines in the population.
- Do not change the reference points until such time as these goal posts are generated from the stock assessment.

3. Management Triggers : MAINTAINED IN DRAFT AM. 7– Management triggers will be further developed by the PDT for further review.

ACTION: Move to keep management triggers in Amendment 7 for analysis and consideration by the Board. Motion passes by consensus.

Original Anglers Guide Text:

Management Triggers are a great precautionary concept, but often difficult to execute. The data generally used for such triggers can be highly variable (F, SSB and recruitment levels). The main goal of a management trigger is to recognize a decline in abundance and trigger corrective management action. Simply put, do not allow the current decline in abundance to happen again.

CCA Recommendations

- Management should focus on a set of triggers that recognize a decline in abundance that so that corrective action can take place.
- All management triggers considered should be tested over a previous time to determine the value of the trigger in avoiding stock declines and recognizing the value of regulatory stability.

4. ~~Stock Rebuilding Target and Schedule~~ – REMOVED FROM DRAFT AM 7: The existing requirements to set fishing mortality to end overfishing in one year and to rebuild the stock to target levels in 10 years will remain in use.

ACTON: Move to remove issue 4, the rebuilding schedule, from further consideration in Amendment 7 and add options for measures to protect the 2015 year class in the development of Draft Amendment 7. Motion carries (12 in favor, 1 opposed, 2 abstentions).

Original Anglers Guide Text:

In most cases rebuilding spawning stock biomass is problematic. As much as managers wish it weren't true, we have little control over rebuilding. The problem is there is often a weak spawner-to-recruit relationship, meaning there are times of low recruitment with high SSB and vice versa. Ideally, there would be a linear relationship between the SSB and the number of recruits, e.g.: if SSB increased 20 percent then recruits increased 20 percent. Unfortunately, that isn't the case because striped bass have a weak spawner-to-recruit relationship.

The reason for the high population level in the late 1990s to early 2000s was due to a period of above average recruitment, coupled with relatively conservative harvest levels compared to pre-moratorium levels. Beginning in the late 2000s, striped bass have undergone a prolonged period of below average recruitment, which is one of the primary reasons we are in the predicament we are in today.

It will be difficult if not impossible for striped bass to rebuild to the current SSB target level if the below average recruitment regime continues. Managers only have control over fishing mortality, which is poorly associated with recruitment. There are many other factors that control recruitment in striped bass, which include habitat, water quality and the forage base.

It is still useful to have a time limit on rebuilding the SSB to at least the threshold level. The question then becomes what happens when managers have maintained F at the target level for 10 years and the stock does not rebuild?

CCA Recommendations

- Utilize a ten-year rebuilding plan that focuses on maintaining F at its target level.
- As much as possible, support improvements to water quality and habitat for striped bass.
- Allow for flexibility in the rebuilding timeline if the Technical Committee determines that factors other than F have contributed to a slow recovery for striped bass.

5. ~~Regional Management~~: REMOVED FROM DRAFT AM 7: Existing coast-wide management approaches will be maintained at this time.

ACTION: Move that issue 5, regional management, be removed from consideration in Draft Amendment 7. Motion made by Mr. McMurray and seconded by Mr. Armstrong. Motion stands approved by consensus.

6. Conservation Equivalency : MAINTAINED IN DRAFT AM. 7 Additional concepts to better define the use of Conservation Equivalency and/or limits of its use will be developed by the PDT for further review.

ACTION: Move to include issue 6, conservation equivalency in Amendment 7. Motion made by Mr. White and seconded by Ms. Ware. Motion is approved by consensus with 1 objection

Original Anglers Guide Text: Combination of issues 5&6:

These topics are combined because each focuses on management options and therefore possibly be interchangeable, depending on what level of flexibility managers want to provide for states with striped bass fisheries. Scientifically, management flexibility will add uncertainty at a time when we need to be maximizing our chance of achieving conservation goals while minimizing risk to the population.

Because Conservation Equivalency is one of the cornerstones of ASMFC management, CCA believes it would be prudent to require states that use CE agree to “pay” for using that privilege with increases in the required mortality reduction when the striped bass stock is overfished or undergoing overfishing.

For example, let’s suppose the Technical Committee determines a 20 percent reduction in harvest is necessary to end overfishing, and also sets coast-wide management measures to accomplish that goal. If a state is granted and implements Conservation Equivalency measures, then that state would commit to achieving at least a 25 percent reduction in their harvest.

Further, because striped bass are a cosmopolitan species that occur from North Carolina to Maine, regional management would make sense if the population dynamics were better understood. To that end, the stock assessment committee is developing a “two stock” model, which hopefully will be ready for use in the near future. If and when it is used, the Striped Bass Board should consider regional management.

The Board in the past has implemented coast-wide regulations and Chesapeake Bay regulations, as it is widely accepted that striped bass stay in the Bay for at least four to six years. Thus, separate coast-wide vs. Chesapeake Bay regulations make sense as long as they meet the required target F rate.

CCA Recommendations

- Continue the development of a multi-stock model to improve managements understanding of stock dynamics.
- Delay the implementation of regional management until a multi-stock model has been approved for management use and the stock is showing signs of recovery.
- Restrict the use of conservation equivalency when the population is in a poor condition.

- Implement coast-wide and Chesapeake Bay-Potomac River regulations for regulatory consistency and stability.

7. Recreational Release Mortality – MAINTAINED IN DOCUMENT

ACTION: Move to maintain issue 7, recreational release mortality in the development of Amendment 7. Motion made by Mr. Gary and seconded by Mr. Cimino. Motion carries (16 in favor).

Original Anglers Guide Text:

Catching and releasing fish is a major part of all fishing, no matter the regulations or the fishery. Until anglers can truly pick the fish that bites their hook and only the fish they want to keep, release mortality will also be a part of fishing. Some anglers choose to release all of the fish they catch while others choose to keep a limit and turn their attention to other species. The possibilities in the recreational fishing world in this regard are truly endless. To manage this cause of mortality, managers recently implemented circle hook regulations.

Recognizing the important role that recreational anglers play in conservation, CCA, Shimano, and the Harte Research Institute developed Releasense.org, a program that strives to:

- Develop sensible recreational fishing principles that promote healthy and sustainable sport fish populations;
- Promote the best catch-and-release practices supported by sound science, and;
- Build partnerships with anglers and industry that allow for efficient access to information that maximizes fish survival and promotes conservation of our sport fish resources.

CCA Recommendations

- Continue working with recreational fishery stakeholders through the advisory panel process to consider additional coast-wide or state based regulatory efforts.
- Leverage partnerships with recreational fishery stakeholders and sport fishing businesses that focus on education and outreach to address recreational release mortality.
- Prioritize funding for coast-wide and state-based education and outreach efforts developed in partnership with stakeholders.
- Coordinate cooperative research efforts that can enhance managements understanding of specific recreational fishery impacts.

8. ~~Recreational Accountability~~ : REMOVED FROM DOCUMENT : No specific recreational accountability concepts will be developed through this action.

ACTION: Motion to remove issue 8, recreational accountability from further consideration in Amendment 7. Motion made by Mr. Armstrong and seconded by Mr. White. Motion passes (10 in favor, 5 opposed).

Note: Multiple Board members spoke in favor of developing better systems to account for recreational catch in a more timely and accurate fashion. Better accounting can be developed by states at any time for consideration in a future management action.

Original Anglers Guide Text:

The term “recreational accountability” directly relates to the management systems ability to account for the impact of recreational fishing. As a whole, recreational anglers are accountable to regulations where they fish and continue to support management through the purchase of fishing licenses and the numerous excise taxes that are placed on the gear anglers use.

As mentioned earlier, recreational fishing activities and the associated catch data can be highly variable. This variability is often increased when the analysis of catch data is broken down to the state level or even by fishing type, also known as “mode.” Put another way, recreational catch data is usually at its best when gathered and estimated coast-wide. It also takes a minimum of 45 days after the data is gathered before an estimate of the catch is known.

Striped bass do not have a recreational quota. Their harvest limit is a fishing mortality rate that is estimated every few years in a stock assessment. This is an acceptable approach given the way recreational catch data is currently gathered. As long as the fishing mortality rate is not exceeded, the stock should not experience problems.

A problem with annual catch limits is they are often based on projections. Projections are a “best guess” of how many fish will be available at some point in the future. It is usually based on “average recruitment,” yet the recreational fishery is fishing on the stock of fish that exist today. As the stock increases, so does the catch; as the stock decreases so does the catch. Putting a hard quota in place, especially one based on projections, often leads to management instability.

CCA Recommendations

- Current limitations of recreational catch data make it difficult to measure accountability using a hard quota on an annual basis.
- Use rigorous stock assessments that occur over 2–3-year intervals to assess changes to recreational catch and its impact on the population.
- Explore Improving recreational catch data collection using electronic reporting and other programs supplemental to the Marine Recreational Information Program.

9. ~~Coastal Commercial Quota Allocation~~: **REMOVED FROM DRAFT AM. 7 – This issue may be considered through separate action at a later date.**

ACTION: Move to include issue 9, coastal commercial quota allocation in Draft Amendment 7. Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Dr. Davis. Motion fails for lack of a majority (6 in favor, 6 opposed, 2 abstentions, 1 null).

Original Anglers Guide Text:

Although the commercial fishery is now viewed as a smaller portion of the overall removals from the fishery, striped bass caught in this fishery definitely impacts the overall status of the coast-wide stock. Given the numerous changes in the commercial fishery that have occurred since the last change in commercial allocation, it is important to consider a new commercial allocation at this time.

CCA Recommendations

- Developing methods for setting quotas and commercial allocation based on the selectivity of each component of the commercial fishery, and its impact on specific portions of the stock, e.g., harvest of SSB vs. juvenile stocks, and the relationship of harvest to spawning and migratory cycles.

- 10. Other Issues – TO BE FURTHER DEVELOPED BY THE PDT – Issues considered under this category will be reviewed by the PDT and developed per the direction of the Board at a later date.**

Original Anglers Guide Text:

This section is used to provide ASMFC with ideas from the public that are not covered by the formal topics included in the PID.

CCA Recommendations

- Amendment 7 should develop a better understanding of habitat and environmental issues that contribute to recruitment success and failure, and consider guidance to states on priorities or actions that may achieve specific outcomes for striped bass.
- Commit to investing in additional surveys to track recruitment throughout the striped bass's range, and to supplement existing indices of juvenile abundance in the Chesapeake Bay.
- Develop a stronger understanding of stock changes driven by climate change.