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#5

June 10, 2016

E.F. "Terry" Stockwell, III
Chairman, New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street
Newburyport, MA 01950

Dear Terry:

I write to encourage you, on behalf of the New England Fishery Management Council, to request joint management of summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Per the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), if any fishery extends beyond the geographical area of authority of any one Council, the Secretary of Commerce may require that the fishery management plan and any amendment to such plan be prepared jointly by the Councils concerned.

Not only have the fisheries for these species historically occurred in the New England Council's jurisdiction, as reflected in the federal and interstate plans' combined commercial allocations to the states of Maine through Connecticut—roughly 25% each for summer flounder and black sea bass and 81% for scup (summer period)—but these species' centers of biomass have shifted northward since these allocation decisions were made (1992 for summer flounder and 2002 for black sea bass and scup).

For black sea bass and scup these northerly distributional shifts are attributed to climate change (warming water temperature), and primarily to fishing mortality (length-structure effects) for summer flounder, although temperature effects are not ruled out (Bell et al. 2015). Indeed, all three species are categorized as having life histories with a strong potential to enable shifts in distribution, by the Northeast Fish and Shellfish Climate Vulnerability Assessment (Hare et al. 2016). This assessment suggests that climate change may also enhance the productivity of one or more of the three species, further increasing their population size in New England waters.

While commercial harvest is constrained by state quotas, recreational catch is more flexible and thus indicative of the growing availability of these species and their importance to New England recreational anglers and for-hire vessels. The New England states' contribution to the total New England (NE) and Mid-Atlantic (MA) recreational catch has increased for all three species from the time the Mid-Atlantic Council was given management authority to today (see table below). This trend is most evident for black sea bass.

	Date of FMP inclusion	Average NE contribution to NE & MA rec. catch (#) in five years preceding FMP	Most recent five year (2011–2015) average NE contribution to NE & MA rec. catch (#)
Summer Flounder	1988	6.8%	9.1%
Scup	1996	51.7%	66.6%
Black Sea Bass	1996	0.6%	28.4%

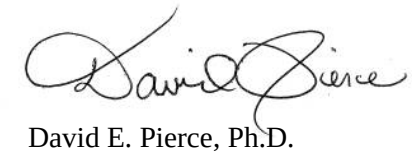
Source: Personal communication, NOAA Fisheries, Fisheries Statistics Division. Marine Recreational Information Program. 6/7/16.

The three species' poleward distributional shifts and/or expansions are unlikely to reverse given the directionality of climate change and/or sustainable management plans. Consequently, summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass will only grow in importance to the commercial and recreational harvesters, as well as seafood dealers and support industries, in New England.

It is high time our constituents have equal representation in deliberations affecting the federal management plan just as all effected states are evenly represented on interstate management plan deliberations through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. With major federal management plan amendments in progress for summer flounder and black sea bass, it is imperative that the New England Council immediately request and receive joint management for these species.

In closing, please add discussion of this request to the New England Council's June 2016 meeting. At a minimum, I intend to raise the issue under other business. I certainly appreciate the Council's full plate and competing priorities. Nevertheless, these southern New England and increasingly northern New England species with their shifting distributions now require joint management.

Sincerely yours,



David E. Pierce, Ph.D.
Director

cc Tom Nies (NEFMC)
Bob Beal, Toni Kerns (ASMFC)
George Peterson, Mary-Lee King, Doug Christel (DFG)
Dan McKiernan, Mike Armstrong, Nichola Meserve (DMF)

References

Bell, RJ, Richardson DE, Hare JA, Lynch PD, and Fratantoni PS. 2014. Disentangling the effects of climate, abundance, and size on the distribution of marine fish: an example based on four stocks from the Northeast US shelf. ICES Journal of Marine Science, 72(5): 1311–1322.

Hare JA, Morrison WE, Nelson MW, Stachura MM, Teeters EJ, Griffis RB, et al. 2016. A Vulnerability Assessment of Fish and Invertebrates to Climate Change on the Northeast U.S. Continental Shelf. PLoS ONE 11(2): e0146756.