

Atlantic Striped Bass Scoping

Summary of written comments from scoping meeting participants

The following comments, issues and concerns were received as written comments from participants at public meetings to consider the scope and significance of issues to be analyzed in development of an environmental impact statement (EIS). This EIS will form the basis for the decision whether or not to follow the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) recommendation to open Federal waters (3-200 miles from shore) to fishing for striped bass, or to develop any alternative regulations for the EEZ.

General Comments/questions:

- Wait until all striped bass age groups are large and healthy. Striped bass shouldn't be considered recovered until the age structure has filled out completely.
 - Even at times when striped bass aren't found in numbers inshore- there are many large, spawning-aged stripers in the EEZ.
 - Wait until the other Amendment 6 measures have been implemented and the impacts of those have been evaluated before opening the EEZ.
 - Striped bass should be made a gamefish, coastwide.
 - Opening the EEZ would benefit everyone by reducing boating congestion inshore, and by letting fishermen return to historic fishing areas.
-

Issues/concerns that should be evaluated

Stock/biological:

- Evaluate whether larger fish, whose abundance Amendment 6 is intended to increase, are concentrated in the EEZ (especially between 3-12 miles offshore), and what the impacts on biomass would be if the EEZ were to be opened.
- Evaluate the impact on the stock of other measures implemented under Amendment 6, before opening the EEZ.
- Evaluate whether large breeders are a result of specific genetic traits, and if so, the impact of increasing the mortality on that segment of the population, assumed to concentrate in the EEZ.
- Evaluate the impact of opening the EEZ on bycatch and discards of striped bass. Vessel logbooks (VTR) and MRFSS data from the EEZ should provide some information to address this issue.
- Evaluate the impact of implementing catch and release fishing, only, on the stock, and the potential value of such a fishery to the improvement of biological data on the stock.
- Consider increasing observer coverage on vessel-types known to take striped bass as bycatch in the EEZ, especially in areas and during times where bycatch is expected to be high (e.g., SE of Cape Cod, during September-November).

Management/fishery:

- Evaluate whether opening the EEZ will result in increased effort (rather and merely a change in distribution) by commercial, charter boat and/or recreational fishermen and therefore in increased dead discards and overfishing, especially when high grading occurs in any of these fisheries. Do trip limits promote high-grading, and can high grading be

- reduced by regulations?
- Evaluate the impact of greater restrictions, especially on inshore and land-based fisheries, that may result if opening the EEZ were to result in increased mortality.
 - Evaluate all possible loopholes in landing and interstate shipment laws that may negatively impact each state's ability to manage its fishery, and/or enforce its regulations were the EEZ to be opened.
 - Determine if opening the EEZ would benefit some states' fisheries to the detriment of fisheries in other states. Also, if fishing mortality increases to the point that added restrictions are necessary, and that increased mortality is due to recreational fisheries off only one or a few states, evaluate measures that could be implemented to ensure states are not impacted disproportionately to the impact of their fishery, by those restrictions.
 - Determine the socio-economic impacts that opening the EEZ may have on both the recreational and commercial fishery sectors, and associated businesses.
 - Evaluate whether or not a slot limit (e.g., 28-36 inches) would protect large spawning aged fish while allowing a reasonable fishery in the EEZ. Would this be enforceable?
 - Determine if framework measures are feasible in EEZ regulations under the Striped Bass Act to ensure the ability to rapidly change regulations if deemed necessary for stock conservation.
 - Determine if keeping the EEZ closed meets the National standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. If conservation or management problems exist, fair remedies, short of EEZ closure, are available within the management program established under Amendment 6.
 - Evaluate implementation of both commercial and recreational possession (trip) limits.
 - Evaluate, as an alternative for the commercial fishery in the EEZ: rod and reel fishing, only; one hook per line; six rods maximum per boat; circle hooks; size limits comparable to the recreational fishery; and a short season.
 - Evaluate rod and reel only, one hook, one rod.
 - Evaluate implementation of no-kill zones during specific times and areas to protect spawners and other critical life stages.
 - Evaluate the likelihood/feasibility of commercial vessels from the various states, fishing off the coasts of other states, especially those states with gamefish status for striped bass. Is this likely to result in an intercept fishery that would prevent fish from moving into state waters and reduce catches by inshore recreational anglers?
 - Evaluate measures that could be implemented to prevent commercial landing of striped bass in states where gamefish laws only address fish taken from that state's waters.
 - Evaluate individual state regulations to identify EEZ measures that would ensure effectiveness of state regulations in state waters.
 - Evaluate alternative measures to restrict the recreational fishery, which currently has no effective harvest controls.
 - Evaluate how to balance between the historic commercial access to striped bass and the evolving present users, i.e., increased recreational pressure.
 - Evaluate the potential impact of a newly developed coast-wide offshore charter/headboat industry on striped bass, especially on larger fish, if fishing is allowed in the EEZ.

Safety/health:

- Evaluate whether opening would create potentially serious problems with health consequences due to PCB contamination problem, especially off NY & NJ.
- Determine if there is a shortage of forage fish for striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay, and if so, whether that or other causes is leading to health problems for this major spawning population of the coastwide stock.
- Evaluate the cause and the impact of the lesions found on a great number of striped bass in recent years.
-

Enforcement:

- Evaluate what problems may occur due to non-uniform enforcement of regulations when multiple jurisdictions would be required to enforce regulations in the EEZ.
- Evaluate measures that would prevent vessels from states that do not have striped bass management measures from landing in those states.
- Evaluate the potential effectiveness of enforcement efforts in the EEZ, if that area were to be opened for the possession and harvest of striped bass.