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New Effort Underway To Study Black Sea Bass In Southern New England

By [AMBAR ESPINOZA \(/PEOPLE/AMBAR-ESPINOZA\)](#) • SEP 21, 2016

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(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wrni/files/styles/x_large/public/201609/BSB_MaleRec.jpg)

A male black sea bass caught in recreational fishing.

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The Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (<http://www.cfrfoundation.org/what-we-do/>) is kicking off a new project to collect data on black sea bass, a species that has moved north in search of cooler water.

Catch limits for black sea bass in New England are small compared to the Mid-Atlantic states, where the fish are typically found, according to Anna Malek Mercer, the foundation's executive director. That means New England fishermen are throwing back very large quantities of black sea bass, she said. And it's a highly valuable species.

“So this will fetch at the dock between \$4 and \$7 a pound,” said Malek Mercer. “It’s super important in that way. Really could begin to fill some of this economic void caused by the downturns in things like ground fish and southern New England lobsters.”

The project will enlist Rhode Island fishermen to collect data on black sea bass.



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“So we'll have eight fishing vessels of a variety of gear types to collect biological data from their catch, as well as bycatch, of black sea bass so that we can begin to assess the characterization of the catch,” including size and sex, said Malek Mercer.

She said black sea bass are an interesting study because they’re born as females then switch to males. Malek Mercer said understanding their biology will help improve managing the species and she hopes that will eventually lead to updated catch limits for New England fishermen.

Fishermen interested in participating have until Friday to apply ([http:// www.cfrfoundation.org/black-sea-bass-fleet/](http://www.cfrfoundation.org/black-sea-bass-fleet/)) to the program. The state Department of Environmental Management is a project partner with funding from the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program.

Earlier this year, CFRF launched a data collection project focused on quahogs ([http:// www.cfrfoundation.org/quahog-research-fleet/](http://www.cfrfoundation.org/quahog-research-fleet/))

in partnership with Roger Williams University. Another project focused on lobsters and jonah crabs (<http://ripr.org/post/one-square-mile-lobstermen-and-scientists-team-collect-data-lobsters>) has been underway for more than two years.

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