

Director's Report

August 2025 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Protected Resources Memo

Incidental Take Permit Report

Rule Suspensions Memo

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management
Council Meeting Report

South Atlantic Fishery Management
Council Meeting Report

Eastern Oyster & Hard Clam
Implementation Memo



JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

July 25, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: David Ushakow, Biologist Supervisor
Protected Resources Program, Fisheries Management Section

SUBJECT: Protected Resources Program Update

Issue

Summary information is provided from the Division's Protected Resources Program on Observer Program activities during spring (March–May) 2025 and the Observer Trip Scheduling System (OTSS) for February–June 2025. Cumulative monthly reports to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) are required for the Sea Turtle and Sturgeon Incidental Take Permit (ITP) in which each month is cumulative across a season.

Overview of the ITP Report for Spring 2025

During spring 2025, the non-exempted large-mesh gill-net fishery was closed statewide. As such, all observer effort was targeted toward the small-mesh gill-net fishery. At the beginning of spring, the small-mesh gill-net fishery was open statewide. However, the observed take of a dead Green Sea Turtle on April 20 in Management Unit (MU) D1 extrapolated to an estimated total that caused the Division to exceed its internal annual take target. Of note, “take target” serves as an internal benchmark to ensure the Division does not exceed authorized take levels as outlined in the ITP. As a result, the Division closed MU D1 and implemented attendance requirements in MUs B, D2, and E to reduce the future likelihood of dead Green Sea Turtle takes (Proclamation [M-9-2025](#)).

During spring, DMF staff conducted 30 small-mesh gill-net observations, and estimated observer coverage met or exceeded the ITP-required levels for the small-mesh gill-net fishery in all MUs. Staff attempted to intercept trips through on-the-water searches and phone calls/in-person contacts. Observers and Marine Patrol officers logged 302 unsuccessful attempts to find and observe on-the-water non-exempt gill-net effort during spring 2025.

Observer Trip Scheduling System (OTSS)

OTSS launched on Monday, February 17 for fishing activity beginning the week of Monday, February 28. At the time of launch, OTSS experienced an outage of the automated phone system component. This outage was quickly resolved, and functionality was restored by 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, February 18. During the outage, Observer Program staff used the non-automated helpline to assist fishermen by manually logging their fishing plans for the following week. Importantly,

this has been the only outage of OTSS to date. From launch through June 2025, 21 trips were observed from the 79 times a fisherman was selected to take an observer (26%).

Prior to OTSS, observers' success rate of scheduling observed trips in advance was significantly reduced. For example, during ITP Year 2024 (September 2023–August 2024) only 3% of observed trips were scheduled in advance. Although advance trip scheduling has improved, the proportion of selected fishermen who fail to contact their assigned observer by 4:00 p.m. on Friday has increased since the issuance of Proclamation [M-9-2025](#) (Table 1).

Notifications

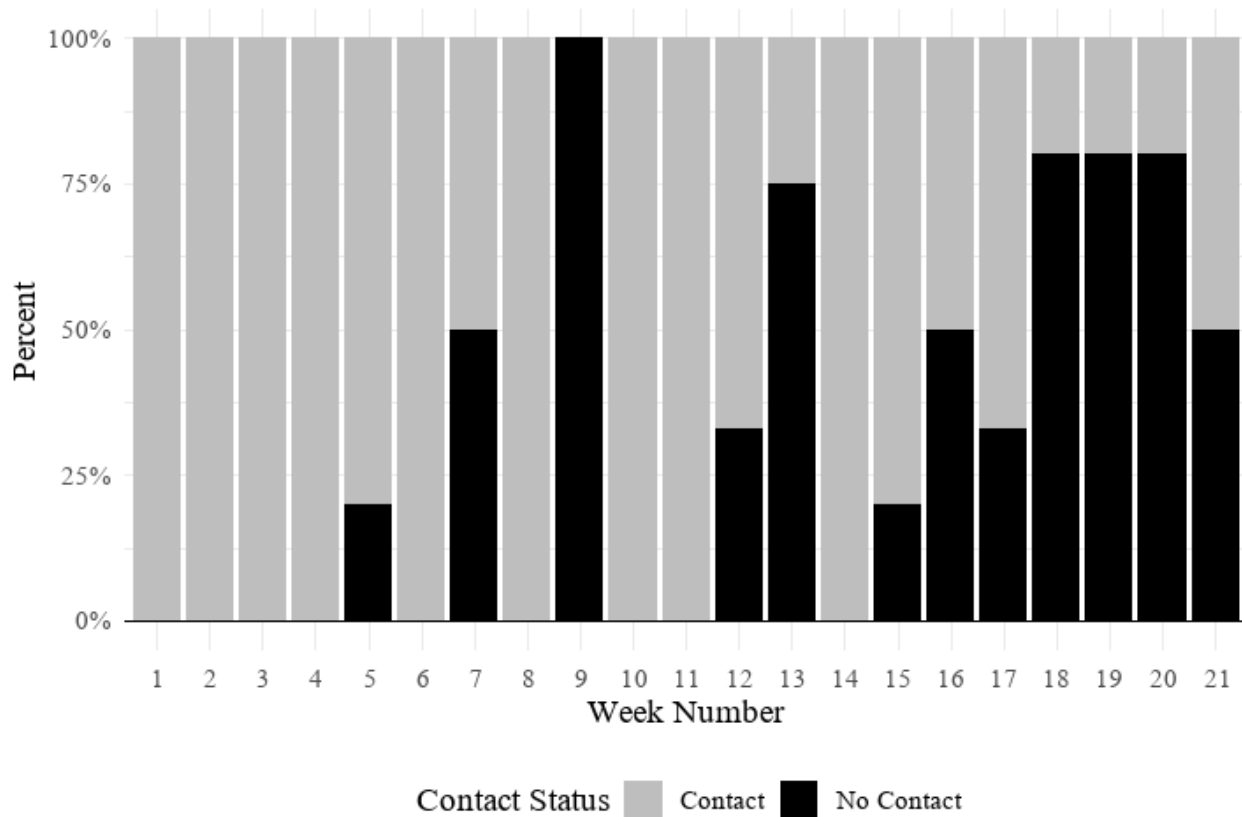
Fishermen receive the following OTSS notifications through their choice of phone call, text message, and/or email: On Mondays and Wednesdays, all active Estuarine Gill Net Permit (EGNP) holders are notified of the upcoming deadline to submit fishing plans for the following week. Each Thursday, fishermen who submit fishing plans through OTSS are automatically contacted with either the name and phone number of their assigned observer (if selected to be observed), or with one to three confirmation numbers (if not selected). On Fridays, all fishermen selected for observation receive a reminder to contact their assigned observer by 4:00 p.m. to arrange to be observed or to cancel. If a phone call is not answered and a voicemail cannot be left, the call attempt is automatically repeated two additional times. Due to comments from the Marine Fisheries Commission and the public, it was determined that the notification frequency should be reduced. Additionally, staff have found that 537 of the 1,236 current EGNP holders are receiving notifications via all three methods.

In response to these comments, beginning in September 2025, Wednesday notifications and retries of unanswered Monday and Friday reminder phone calls will be eliminated. In advance of this adjustment, the Division is mailing an informational postcard to EGNP holders to announce the change, inform permittees they may opt out of two of the three notification methods, and request that permittees update their notification preferences.

Action Needed

For informational purposes only; **no action is needed at this time.**

Table 1. Weekly percentages of selected fishermen who contacted their assigned observer by 4:00 p.m. on Friday and those who did not (i.e., No Contact) under the Observer Trip Scheduling System. Weeks are numbered starting from the launch date of OTSS whereas week 1 is February 24, 2025 – March 2, 2025.



The final documents can be found at the following links:

[Spring 2025 Seasonal Sea Turtle and Sturgeon ITP Report](#)

**Cumulative Monthly Progress Report
Incidental Take Permit No. 27106
March 1, 2025 – May 31, 2025
ITP Year 2025**



**David Ushakow
North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality
North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries
Protected Resources Program
3441 Arendell Street
Morehead City, NC 28557**

June 30, 2025

This document serves as a report on the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) Observer Program activities during spring (March – May) 2025, of the 2025 Incidental Take Permit (ITP) Year (September 1, 2024 – August 31, 2025) for ITP #27106. Throughout this memo, all references to gill nets are for estuarine non-exempt gill nets (i.e., all gill nets except drift and runaround/drop/strike gill nets as defined in the ITP), unless stated otherwise. Mesh-size categories for gill nets are large-mesh, defined as ≥ 5 inches stretched mesh (ISM), and small-mesh, defined as < 5 ISM. Finally, data used in this monthly report are preliminary and subject to change.

Small-Mesh Gill-Net Fishery

All Management Units (MUs) were open to the small-mesh gill net fishery through April 19, 2025. On April 20, 2025, after conferring with NMFS staff, MU D1 was closed to small-mesh gill nets and attendance requirements were set for MUs B, D2, and E to reduce the likelihood of lethal sea turtle takes (Proclamation M-9-2025).

Large-Mesh Gill-Net Fishery

The large-mesh gill-net fishery remained closed state-wide throughout spring 2025.

Fishing Effort Estimation

Prior to the spring season, the Observer Program used reported Trip Ticket Program (TTP) data to estimate the observed trips required to achieve ITP-mandated coverage levels for both small- and large-mesh fisheries. Small-mesh effort was estimated by month and MU using the most recent five years of TTP data. The resulting observed trip quota was then sent to NMFS for their concurrence, which was received on February 3, 2025.

Observed Trip and Incidental Take Summary

During spring 2025, there were observations of 30 small-mesh trips coastwide (Table 1). In addition to observed trips, there were 302 unsuccessful attempts to locate non-exempt gill-net fishing activity (i.e., No-Contact Trips). As such, observer coverage met or exceeded the 1% minimum target in all MUs for spring 2025 (Table 1).

During the observed small-mesh trips, a single live Atlantic Sturgeon take was observed in MU B, and a single lethal Green Sea Turtle take was observed in MU D1 (Table 2). The Green Sea Turtle was transferred to Matthew Godfrey (NCWRC) for necropsy which occurred on April 18. Findings were consistent with forced submergence due to entanglement (Figure 1).

Cumulative estimated and observed incidental takes during the 2025 ITP Year through May 2025 are included in Table 3. As a reminder, estimated take numbers are preliminary.

Table 1. Numbers of observed small-mesh (< 5 inches stretched mesh) estuarine non-exempt gill-net trips ($n = 30$) and estimates of observer coverage by Management Unit (MU) during spring (March - May) of ITP Year 2025 (September 1, 2024 – August 30, 2025). Numbers of No-Contact trips ($n = 302$) by MU are also provided. No-Contact refers to unsuccessful attempts to find and observe non-exempt gill-net effort.

Month	Management Unit	Estimated Total Trips	Observed Trips Needed for 2% Coverage	Observed Trips Needed for 1% Coverage	Observed Trips	Estimated Observer Coverage (%)	No-Contact Trips
March 2025	A	321	7	4	4	1.2	32
	B	312	7	4	8	2.6	12
	C	61	2	1	2	3.3	5
	D1	23	1	1	2	8.7	0
	D2	1	1	1	0	0.0	3
	E	22	1	1	3	13.6	33
April 2025	A	253	6	3	3	1.2	39
	B	548	11	6	5	0.9	16
	C	46	1	1	0	0.0	12
	D1	54	2	1	1	1.9	1
	D2	3	1	1	0	0.0	6
	E	40	1	1	0	0.0	34
May 2025	A	112	3	2	0	0.0	48
	B	469	10	5	1	0.2	22
	C	56	2	1	0	0.0	8
	D1	43	1	1	0	0.0	0
	D2	7	1	1	1	14.3	1
	E	50	1	1	0	0.0	30
Spring 2025	A	686	14	7	7	1.0	119
	B	1,329	27	14	14	1.1	50
	C	163	4	2	2	1.2	25
	D1	120	3	2	3	2.5	1
	D2	11	1	1	1	9.1	10
	E	112	3	2	3	2.7	97
Overall		2,421	—	—	30	1.2	302

Table 2. Summary of protected species incidental takes during March – May of Incidental Take Permit Year 2025 (September 1, 2024 – August 30, 2025).

Date	Species	Condition	Management Unit	Latitude (DD)	Longitude (DD)	Mesh-Size Category	Total Length or CCL (mm)	Fork Length or CCW (mm)	Soak Time (Mins)	Length of Net (Yards)	Number of Nets
3/3/2025	Atlantic Sturgeon	Released Alive	B	35.35330	-76.12203	Small	N/R	N/R	900	100	7
4/14/2025	Green Sea Turtle	Dead	D1	34.89970	-76.27689	Small	283	250	840	100	8

Table 3. A comparison of authorized incidental takes by species to actual counts or predicted counts of observed incidental takes during ITP Year 2025 (September 1, 2024 – August 30, 2025) through May. Takes are either combined or separate for mesh-size category and disposition. Mesh-size categories are large (≥ 5 ISM [inches stretch mesh]) and small (< 5 ISM). The table above the double line is of species with authorized two-year rolling take limits, and the table below the double line is of species with authorized take limits spanning the duration of the permit.

Species	Mesh-size Category	Disposition	Takes Predicted or Observed	Authorized 2-year Rolling Take	Takes
Atlantic Sturgeon	Large & Small	Live	Predicted	436	36.9
		Dead	Observed	6	1
Green Sea Turtle	Large & Small	Live	Predicted	542	53.2
		Dead	Predicted	170	101.7
Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle	Large	Live	Observed	10	1
		Dead	Observed	4	1
	Small	Live or Dead	Observed	4	0
Loggerhead Sea Turtle	Large & Small	Live or Dead	Observed	4	0

Species	Mesh-size Category	Disposition	Predicted or Observed Takes	Authorized Total Take Over Permit Duration	Takes
Shortnose Sturgeon	Large & Small	Live or Dead	Observed	4	0
Hawksbill Sea Turtle	Large & Small	Live or Dead	Observed	2	0
Leatherback Sea Turtle	Large & Small	Live or Dead	Observed	2	0

Figure 1. Necropsy results for dead Green Sea Turtle small-mesh gill-net take on April 14, 2025.

North Carolina Aquariums &
NCSU College of Veterinary Medicine
Center for Marine Sciences and Technology
18 April 2025

Craig Harms DVM, PhD, DACZM

Attn: Matthew Godfrey, Sarah Finn

Cm-DMF-250414-01, *Chelonia mydas*, Weight: 2.48 kg, BCS 2.5/5, male

SCL-N	26.6 cm
SCL-T	27.1 cm
SCW	22.1 cm

Hx: juvenile green turtle found in gill net on 14Apr2025, frozen for later necropsy. Removed from freezer on 17Apr to thaw in cold room, necropsy performed late afternoon 18Apr2025 and NC State CMAST. Label affixed to LFF reads "466 4-14-2025, Green Turtle, Old Drum Inlet."

External findings: turtle is slightly thin, with ~85% mostly small barnacle and sediment coverage of the carapace (the parts without epibiota are cranial over the shoulders), numerous small soft tissue barnacles on the flippers, plastron with only ~5% small barnacle coverage. Erythema under chin, both axillae, patches on palmar surfaces of FFs bilaterally, and in perineum. Extreme distal tip of the RFF is missing (healed). No fractures visible or palpated, no lacerations.

Internal findings: dark red possible hemorrhage in pectoral muscles in close proximity to pectoral girdle. Adequate fat, no fat atrophy, no muscle atrophy, light load of trypanorhynch cestode cysts in gastric serosa. There is a small amount of light pink foam throughout the trachea and bronchi, and lungs are mildly edematous. Liver, spleen, adrenal glands, thyroid, testes, stomach, intestines, kidneys, urinary bladder, heart, shoulder joints, brain, all NSF. Gall bladder is about ¾ full of dark green bile. There is no gas in cardiac chambers. The stomach, small and large intestines are ~80% filled with sea grasses in various states of digestion. No plastic is observe in the GI tract.

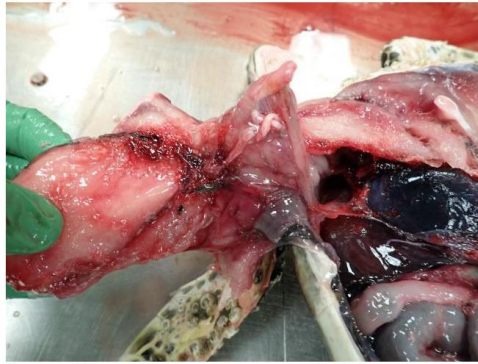
Interpretation: no underlying pathology is observed that would have contributed to death other than the observation of being found in a gill net. The possible hemorrhage in pectoral muscles may be an indication of struggling while entrapped underwater, as is occasionally observed in forced submergence cases. Light foam in the airways and pulmonary edema are consistent with though not diagnostic of forced submergence. Unless the craniolateral carapace was cleaned postmortem, the absence of epibiota and associated sediment in those patches may have resulted from being rubbed off by the net while the turtle attempted to extricate itself.



Dorsal view



Ventral view



Pectoral muscle insertions, possible hemorrhage



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July 25, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Jason Rock, Fisheries Management Section Chief

SUBJECT: Temporary Rule Suspensions

Issue

In accordance with the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Resource Management Policy Number 2014-2, Temporary Rule Suspension, the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission will vote on any new rule suspensions that have occurred since the last meeting of the commission.

Findings

There have been no new rule suspensions since the May 2025 meeting. Proclamation M-11-2023 was rescinded, effective May 22, 2025, as the suspended portion of NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03O .0501 (e)(4) PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS TO OBTAIN PERMITS was deleted via a rule amendment that became effective March 24, 2025.

Action Needed

No action is needed.

Overview

In accordance with policy, the division will report current rule suspensions previously approved by the commission as non-action items. They include:

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0103 (h) GILL NETS, SEINES, IDENTIFICATION, RESTRICTIONS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to implement year-round small mesh gill net attendance requirements in certain areas of the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse rivers systems. This action was taken as part of a department initiative to review existing small mesh gill net rules to limit yardage and address attendance requirements in certain areas of the state. This suspension continues in Proclamation [M-13-2025](#).



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NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0501 (e)(2) DEFINITIONS AND STANDARDS FOR POUND NETS AND POUND NET SETS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to increase the minimum mesh size of escape panels for flounder pound nets in accordance with Amendment 3 of the North Carolina Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in proclamation [M-34-2015](#) and continues in Proclamation [M-9-2024](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03L .0103 (a)(1) PROHIBITED NETS, MESH LENGTHS AND AREAS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to adjust trawl net minimum mesh size requirements in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Shrimp Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation SH-3-2019 and continues in Proclamation [SH-1-2022](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03L .0105 (2) RECREATIONAL SHRIMP LIMITS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to modify the recreational possession limit of shrimp by removing the four quarts heads on and two and a half quarts heads off prohibition from waters closed to shrimping in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Shrimp Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [SH-4-2022](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03L .0205 (a) CRAB SPAWNING SANCTUARIES

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to close crab spawning sanctuaries year-round to the use of trawls in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Shrimp Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [M-13-2024](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0502 (a) MULLET

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to modify the recreational and for-hire possession limits of mullet in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [FF-27-2024](#).



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NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0515 (a)(2) DOLPHIN

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to adjust the recreational vessel limit to complement management of dolphin under the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Amendment 10 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [FF-30-2022](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03Q .0107 (4) SPECIAL REGULATIONS: JOINT WATERS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to adjust the creel limit for American shad under the management framework of the North Carolina American Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan. This suspension was continued in Proclamation [FF-8-2025](#).

June 2025 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met June 3-5, 2025, in Virginia Beach, VA. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's [June 2025 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Adopted 2026 specifications for blueline tilefish
- Reviewed previously adopted 2026 specifications for golden tilefish and recommended no changes
- Maintained status quo chub mackerel specifications for 2026-2028
- Reviewed and recommended no changes to previously adopted 2026 specifications for butterfish
- Reviewed and recommended no changes to previously adopted 2026 specifications for longfin squid
- Reviewed and recommended no changes to previously adopted 2026 specifications for Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog
- Adopted a range of alternatives to be considered as part of the Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures Framework
- Received an update on development of the Joint New England and Mid-Atlantic Council Omnibus Alternative Gear Marking Framework Adjustment
- Received an update on development of a white paper on the scientific considerations of developing separate overfishing limits and acceptable biological catch limits for the commercial and recreational sectors of the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries
- Received a presentation on the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Cost Survey for Commercial Fishing Businesses
- Received an update on ocean modeling products being developed using the Modular Ocean Model 6 via NOAA's Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative
- Reviewed Executive Order 14276: "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness" and briefly discussed next steps for developing a response
- Discussed a For-Hire Letter of Authorization concept proposal

2026 Blueline Tilefish Specifications

The Council reviewed the most recent data limited model toolkit (DLM toolkit) for blueline tilefish north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina recently conducted through the Southeast, Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 92 process. The Council also adopted 2026 specifications for the blueline tilefish fishery north of the North Carolina/Virginia border. Specifications were set for a single year given the Scientific and Statistical Committee's recommendation for a single year Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC). The discussion highlighted several sources of uncertainty identified by the SSC, including the absence of stock status, uncertainty associated with the sustainability of recent catch, and high variability and percent standard error (PSE) in private recreational catch estimates. The Council's recommendations are summarized in the table below.

Summary of Blueline Tilefish 2026 Specifications	
Acceptable Biological Catch	452,200 pounds
Recreational Total Allowable Landings	323,504 pounds

Recreational Trip Limits	Private vessel: 3 fish USCG uninspected for-hire vessel: 5 fish USCG inspected for-hire vessel: 7 fish
Commercial Total Allowable Landings	109,885 pounds
Commercial Trip Limits	500 pounds (until 70% of quota met, reduced to 300 pounds)

2026 Golden Tilefish Specifications Review

In 2026, golden tilefish will be in year 2 of multiyear specifications previously adopted for the 2025-2027 fishing years. After reviewing updated fishery information and considering recommendations from its SSC, Tilefish Monitoring Committee, Advisory Panel, and staff, the Council recommended no changes to the 2026 specifications. Additional details about these specifications are provided in the [August 2024 Meeting Summary](#).

2026-2028 Chub Mackerel Specifications

After considering recommendations and input from the SSC, Monitoring Committee, and Advisory Panel, the Council agreed to maintain status quo chub mackerel specifications for 2026-2028. These specifications have remained unchanged since they were first implemented in 2020. The total allowable landings limit for 2026-2028 will remain at 4.50 million pounds, which is well above recent landings.

2026 Butterfish Specifications Review

The Council recommended no changes to the previously adopted 2026 specifications for butterfish. The ABC and commercial quota are planned to decrease in 2026 compared to 2025, but the commercial quota (8,051 metric tons) would still be several times higher than recent annual landings. These specifications are described in detail in the [proposed rule](#) published May 13, 2025. The Council recommended no changes to other management measures.

2026 Longfin Squid Specifications Review

The Council recommended no changes to the previously adopted 2026 specifications for longfin squid. The ABC and commercial quota (22,894 metric tons) are planned to stay the same in 2026 compared to 2025. These specifications are described in detail in the [final rule](#) published July 23, 2024. The Council recommended no changes to other management measures.

2026 Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Specifications Review

The Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries are approaching the sixth year of multi-year specifications previously set for the 2021-2026 fishing years. During this meeting, the Council reviewed recent information for both stocks and considered whether any changes to 2026 specifications are warranted. The Council recommended no changes for either species. To maintain the current measures, the Council voted to recommend the Regional Administrator suspend the minimum shell length for surfclam in 2026. These specifications are described in detail in the [final rule](#) published May 13, 2021.

Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures and 2026-2027 Specifications Framework

The Council adopted a range of alternatives to be considered as part of the [Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures Framework](#). The Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) currently requires pound for pound paybacks of any Annual Catch Limit (ACL) overages as an accountability measure. This framework adjustment will consider if there are some circumstances where modified/relaxed payback accountability measures may be sufficient. This action aims to avoid unnecessary paybacks of ACL overages and minimize associated fishery disruptions in the spiny dogfish fishery. The Council agreed to include 2026-2027 specifications, which had been

planned as a separate action, in the framework. The Council also included a request to its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to include catch recommendation options based on both the Council's standard Risk Policy (lowers catches to reduce the risk of overfishing) and based on setting catches at the highest legal level (i.e., up to the overfishing limit). The New England Fishery Management Council will review the action in late June 2025. Final action by the Councils is anticipated in October/December 2025 after the Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel and the Joint Spiny Dogfish Committee meet (likely in August/September) to provide recommendations.

[Gear Marking/On-Demand Gear Framework](#)

The Council received an update from Caroline Potter (GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division) on development of the Joint New England and Mid-Atlantic Council Omnibus [Alternative Gear Marking Framework](#) Adjustment. This action considers revisions to gear marking regulations to allow the use of fixed gear without a persistent buoy line in fixed-gear fisheries in the Greater Atlantic Region; this would reconcile fishery management plan regulations with recent and potential future changes to Marine Mammal Protection Act regulations. [PDT/FMAT Meeting 5](#) is scheduled for July 8, 2025. Both the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils initiated action in April 2025; the Councils are expected to take final action in September 2025 and October 2025, respectively.

[Unmanaged Commercial Landings Report](#)

The Council reviewed an [annual report](#) that summarizes commercial landings of species in locations where they are not managed at the state or federal level with a possession limit, size limit, seasonal closure, or limited access. The report also summarizes commercial landings of the species designated as Ecosystem Components through the Council's Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. The goal of this report is to look for signs of developing commercial fisheries for unmanaged species or Ecosystem Component species. Council staff suggested that none of the landings in this year's report suggest immediate concern. However, it may be worth continuing to monitor Atlantic cutlassfish and conch/whelk landings as they have exceeded 1 million pounds in recent years and are concentrated in the Mid-Atlantic. The Council did not express any concerns with the landings trends shown in this year's report.

[White Paper on Separate Overfishing Limits \(OFLs\) and Acceptable Biological Catch Limits \(ABCs\) for Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass](#)

The Council received an update on progress made by the SSC to develop a white paper on the scientific considerations of developing separate OFLs and ABCs for the commercial and recreational sectors of the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries. The Council reviewed potential approaches identified by the SSC, as well as several associated implications. The Council agreed that the work carried out thus far is sufficient to form the basis for the white paper. The SSC will review and approve a final white paper at an upcoming meeting in 2025. The Council discussed that legal requirements and other additional considerations beyond what will be addressed in the white paper would need to be further evaluated before any of these approaches could be used in management.

[Northeast Fisheries Science Center Cost Survey for Commercial Fishing Businesses](#)

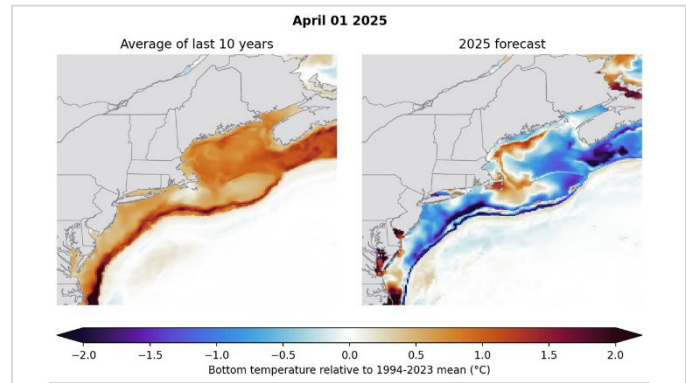
The Council received a presentation from Gregory Ardini (Social Science Branch of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)) on the 2023 Northeast Commercial Fishing Vessel Cost Survey that collected costs incurred by vessel owners during 2022. Cost surveys are routinely conducted by the NEFSC to collect commercial fishing business costs from vessel owners in the Greater Atlantic Region. Collected data is used in a number of ways, including understanding cost trends, tracking economic performance of fleets, and generating analysis

that informs management decisions. For additional information, see the Cost Survey Project page found [here](#) and the Cost Data Visualization Tool found [here](#).

2025 Modular Ocean Model (MOM) 6 Presentation

The Council received an update on ocean modeling products being developed using the Modular Ocean Model 6 (MOM6) via NOAA's [Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative](#) (CEFI). This initiative supports the development of high resolution regional ocean modeling products, including hindcast simulations, seasonal forecasts (out to 1 year), decadal projections (out to 10 years), and long terms projections (out to year 2100).

As reported in the [2025 State of the Ecosystem Report](#), Northeast US ocean temperature conditions in 2024 were cooler than the recent average. [Newly available short-term forecasts](#) for 2025 predict this trend will continue in much of the region, with notably cooler than average bottom temperatures [predicted for the Gulf of Maine](#) this spring and summer and may provide valuable insights on future stock productivity for fishermen and managers. However, this prediction is not uniform throughout the Greater Atlantic region, and the southern Mid-Atlantic Bight is expected to experience bottom temperatures that are much warmer than average during the same time period.



MOM6 Forecast for Bottom Temperature in the Northeast Region
([click here to view animation](#))

Longer term forecasts predict that while sea surface temperatures will continue to experience an overall warming trend, this warming trend is expected to experience a temporary "pause" over the next decade due to natural fluctuations in ocean circulation patterns and a more southerly position of the Gulf Stream. In addition, on the water observations and data collection efforts with industry partners help inform and ground truth the model forecasting skills. Regional ocean model outputs, documentation, and additional information are available on the CEFI data portal at: https://psl.noaa.gov/cefi_portal/.

Offshore Wind Monitoring Standards Update

Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) staff presented a summary of an effort to develop standards for monitoring surveys that are used to evaluate the impacts of offshore wind energy projects on fishery species, protected species, and socioeconomic impacts. Currently, this monitoring is done on a project by project basis. Development of monitoring standards aims to achieve greater consistency in the methods used across projects to help allow for integration of data across projects and evaluation of regional-scale impacts. The Council agreed to provide additional feedback on the monitoring standards once a draft document is available later this summer.

Other Business

Departing Council Members

The Council bid farewell to four Mid-Atlantic Council members: Wes Townsend (Delaware), Ken Neill (Virginia), Peter Hughes (New Jersey), and Dan Farnham (New York). In addition, the Council recognized Rick Bellavance, who has served as the New England Council's liaison to the Mid-Atlantic Council for the past year. The Council expressed its sincere appreciation to each of these individuals for their dedication and service.

Executive Orders

The Council discussed several recent executive orders. Executive Order (EO) 14276: “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness” directs the Regional Fishery Management Councils to develop prioritized lists of recommended actions to reduce burdens on domestic fishing and increase production. The Council briefly discussed next steps for generating a list of recommendations. Staff also provided an update on the recommendations submitted by the Council in response to a similar EO in 2020. In the coming weeks staff will circulate feedback forms for the Council and members of the public to provide input. The Council will review input and develop a prioritized list of recommendations at the August Council Meeting.

Staff also provided a brief overview of EO 14192: “Unleashing Prosperity through Deregulation,” with a focus on potential implications for the Council. This EO requires each federal agency to repeal at least ten existing regulations or guidance documents for every new regulatory action. NMFS staff have indicated that the majority of council actions are considered deregulatory or are classified as “routine fishery management measures,” such as annual specifications, which are exempt from the 10-for-1 requirements. However, discretionary regulatory actions are subject to evaluation to determine whether they are regulatory or deregulatory. The Department of Commerce will compile a list of such actions each fall to assess compliance with the deregulatory targets. Given limited agency resources, any discretionary regulatory proposals will require prioritization and careful evaluation.

Comment Letters

The Council directed staff to submit comments in response to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) [Request for Information and Comments](#) on the Preparation of the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program. The Council’s comments were submitted on 6/11/25 and can be read [here](#).

Executive Director Chris Moore also noted that the following comment letters were submitted by the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) following their meeting in May:

- [CCC Letter to Secretary Lutnick Regarding FY2025 Council Funding](#) (05/27/25)
- [CCC Response to Representative Magaziner’s Inquiry Regarding the Current State of Fisheries](#) (05/29/25)

For-Hire Letter of Authorization Concept

Regional Administrator Mike Pentony presented a [Letter of Authorization \(LOA\) concept](#) for potential inclusion in the Recreational Sector Separation Amendment. He outlined how a voluntary federal LOA system could be implemented for federally permitted for-hire vessels targeting summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. Under this proposal, states would have the option to opt in each year, and only vessels from participating states could obtain an LOA. Participating vessels would be subject to separate federal measures and exempt from coastwide or conservation equivalency regulations, with the goal of providing more tailored and economically viable management options for the for-hire sector. Mr. Pentony noted that the private sector accounts for the majority of recreational catch, and the LOA concept could help support the economic viability of the for-hire industry. Council members generally expressed support for further consideration of the concept, noting that many operational details would require additional discussion. The Council is expected to revisit the LOA proposal during its joint meeting with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s Policy Board in August, when the two bodies will review draft approaches for further development.

Upcoming Meetings

The next Council meeting will be held **August 11-14, 2025**, in Annapolis, Maryland. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 19, 2025

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Federal Fishery Managers Consider New Approaches

Budget cuts, staff reductions and Executive Orders lead to open discussion for changes in federal fishery management; Options proposed for the commercial snapper grouper fishery, black sea bass management; Public hearings scheduled for Shrimp Fishery Access Area

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met this past week in Cape Canaveral, Florida to address federal fishery management issues in the South Atlantic region. During the week-long meeting, the Council acknowledged that new approaches may be necessary to federal fisheries management given recent changes that include reductions in staffing and funding at NOAA Fisheries, as well as Executive Order 14276 *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*.

The Council will develop its response to the directives in Executive Order 14276, including identifying measures to reduce regulatory burden and promote domestic fisheries. Information will be provided on the Council website and input solicited from the public and Council advisory panels. Council members identified initial items that respond to the Executive Order during last week's meeting, including revision or removal of the "2 for 1" provision for commercial snapper grouper federal permits, removing species from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit, addressing shark depredation, and shifting management of Spiny Lobster to the State of Florida. The Council will review public input and continue discussions during its September 2025 meeting.

Commercial Snapper Grouper Fishery

After reviewing input from the Commercial Snapper Grouper Sub-Committee, the Council decided to move forward with scoping to gather input on management changes to be considered through Amendment 60 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. Potential actions at this time include revising or removing the current 2 for 1 snapper grouper unlimited permit policy and the requirements to acquire or retain a snapper grouper (SG1) commercial permit; considering dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season; and establishing a non-target or out-of-season allowance for harvest.

Public scoping will be held online this summer and public feedback will be presented to the Commercial Sub-Committee at the September 2025 Council meeting.

Black Sea Bass

The results of the latest stock assessment for Black Sea Bass in the South Atlantic indicate the stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing despite uncertainties noted by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in the information used to develop catch level recommendations.

(Continued)

The Council will develop a framework amendment to address declining Black Sea Bass abundance. Potential actions will consider lowering Black Sea Bass catch levels, changes to minimum size limits, reducing the recreational bag limit, and implementing a spawning season closure. The Council requested further evaluation of the assessment by the SSC and additional peer review.

Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area – Oculina Bank HAPC

The Council continued discussion of amendments to the Coral Fishery Management Plan and Shrimp Fishery Management Plan to establish a shrimp fishery access area for the rock shrimp fishery along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC). The Coral HAPC extends along the eastern coast of Florida where deepwater coral, *Oculina varicosa*, is known to exist. Council members considered comments in support of allowing fishing in the historical area as well as those opposing any additional access to the deepwater coral HAPC.

Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12 would allow federally permitted rock shrimp vessels access within a designated area along the eastern boundary of the Coral HAPC where the rock shrimp fishery operated historically. Federally permitted rock shrimp vessels are required to have Vessel Monitoring Systems to identify their location at all times.

The Council will hold two public hearings prior to its September 2025 meeting.

Other Business

In order to focus on actions that are de-regulatory in accordance with Executive Orders, the Council paused work on the For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment as well as an amendment to implement a private recreational permit and education requirement for the snapper grouper fishery. The amendments remain in the Council's work plan, but the timing of development is uncertain.

Additional information about the Council's June 2025 meeting, including individual reports from committee meetings and meetings of the full council, are available from the Council's website at: [June 2025 Council Meeting - South Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#). The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for September 15-19, 2025, in North Charleston, South Carolina.

<p>The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.</p>
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JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

July 31, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Bennett Paradis (oyster co-lead), Lorena da la Garza (clam co-lead), Chloe Dorin (clam co-lead)

SUBJECT: Eastern Oyster Fishery Management Plan Amendment 5 and Hard Clam Fishery Management Plan Amendment 3 Implementation Update

Issue

Update the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) on recent implementation progress for the Eastern Oyster Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendment 5 and the Hard Clam FMP Amendment 3.

Action Needed

For informational purposes only, **no action is needed at this time.**

Supporting Documents

- [Amendment 5 to the Eastern Oyster Fishery Management Plan, 2025](#)
- [Amendment 3 to the Hard Clam Fishery Management Plan, 2025](#)

Overview

This memo provides an overview of the progress made towards implementation of Amendment 5 to the Eastern Oyster FMP and Amendment 3 to the Hard Clam FMP, including **monitoring efforts for the adopted Deepwater Oyster Recovery Areas (DORAs), the establishment of rotational harvest management sites, and updates to the trigger sampling methodology** ahead of the mechanical harvest season for oysters in Pamlico Sound, North Carolina. It also provides an update on the **phase out of mechanical clam harvest** and the Division's exploration of potential options to **estimate recreational shellfish harvest** and establish a mechanism to routinely provide all recreational shellfish harvesters with health and safety information.

Deepwater Oyster Recovery Area Monitoring

The remnant deep-water natural oyster reefs in the Pamlico and Neuse rivers have been recognized by the MFC as a habitat requiring protection due to their ecological importance and vulnerability. These reefs have suffered from historical harvest, disease outbreak, habitat destruction, and mass mortality from water quality impacts, including low dissolved oxygen (hypoxic) events. Sites that contain these deep-water natural oyster reefs have been nominated by the MFC as Strategic Habitat Areas for the Pamlico Sound System.

North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) monitoring of the oyster resource in these areas has indicated that these reefs have few live or legal oysters and likely have not supported much fishery effort between the 2018–2019 and 2023–2024 oyster seasons. With these observations in mind, Amendment 5 of the Eastern Oyster FMP established two DORAs, one in the Neuse River and one in the Pamlico River. Beginning with the 2025 season, mechanical oyster harvest (dredging) will be prohibited in these DORAs. The long-term goal of DORAs is to allow deep-water oyster reefs to grow and accumulate living oysters and dead shell material to gain the height necessary to better function as habitat and be resilient to hypoxic events.

Initial monitoring efforts are already underway by NCDMF. Bathymetric and side-scan sonar surveys of the DORA reefs were completed in June and July of 2025. Efforts to map natural oyster reefs in the Neuse DORA included 127 acres of the known historical footprint (70% of the Neuse DORA reefs). In the Pamlico DORA, 99% of the known reefs have been scanned. The raw data from these scans are currently being processed to generate high resolution maps of the delineated reefs, providing a baseline for habitat footprint, vertical relief, and rugosity on these oyster reefs. SCUBA surveys are currently planned for late summer and early fall. These surveys will collect useful oyster metrics and representative data that will give greater detail to the condition of oysters in the DORAs, including size-class density estimates and population structure. The division will continue monitoring efforts to gather data to inform the MFC on the status of the DORAs, which will be re-evaluated under the next scheduled review of the FMP.

Rotational Harvest Management Cultch Sites NCDMF has constructed 13 of the 10-acre rotational harvest management cultch sites, with an additional five sites currently in development. A significant portion of cultch planting efforts and operating budget have been allocated to the establishment of rotational harvest sites. The teams on the R/V Oyster Creek, R/V Shell Point, and R/V Crab Slough have been instrumental in planting these sites with adequate material to span 10-acres and support subsequent oyster settlement and growth.

A schedule guiding the openings, closings, post-harvest evaluations, and re-planting efforts has been developed. Four sites will be opened via proclamation for the entirety of the 2025-2026 mechanical season. Each rotational site will be marked with four corner buoys. Marker buoys will be set 50 feet from the 10-acre permit boundary to allow commercial vessels to operate without hinderance. NCDMF is currently identifying funding sources for purchasing the buoy systems, and buoys will be deployed prior to the beginning of the mechanical harvest season in November

These rotational sites are also being monitored using similar methodologies as DORAs and typical cultch sites. At each rotational site, bathymetric and side scan sonar surveys have been completed to measure material footprint and persistence of material over time. Such surveys allow for direct comparison to natural reefs in terms of rugosity, a common index for quantifying habitat complexity.

Pre-season and in-season trigger sampling efforts

The cultch supported harvest strategy adopted within Amendment 5 to the Oyster FMP included a proposed revamped framework for monitoring areas where public oyster mechanical harvest occurs. This framework, here on referred to as ‘trigger sampling’, replaces the original protocol adopted in 2010 under Supplement A to Amendment 2 of the Oyster FMP. However, along with declining participation in the mechanical commercial oyster fishery, this previous methodology was affected by uncertain sample locations, sampling gear, and concerns about sampling accuracy resulting in highly variable and uncertain season lengths.

The changes to the trigger sampling protocol include: 1) transitioning from a dredge to hydraulic patent tongs for sampling, 2) conducting a pre-season survey to set a fixed season length and reduce uncertainty, 3) conducting a mid-season survey to re-examine season length, and 4) communicating with participants to ascertain coordinates for the aforementioned trigger sampling surveys.

Patent tongs offer a relatively straightforward and efficient method for collecting standardized samples from oyster reefs as they have been utilized in an annual survey by Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) and Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) since 1993. In addition to their use for season management, the data collected following this protocol may also be used for direct comparisons with other existing historical oyster monitoring programs (wild, cultch, oyster sanctuaries) and ultimately toward future stock assessment efforts. NCDMF staff have begun retrofitting survey vessels with tong equipment necessary for sampling in Pamlico Sound.

NCDMF staff have been proactive in communicating with participants in the mechanical oyster fishery about efforts to monitor areas open to public mechanical harvest. Currently, staff are planning to contact participants to request information to guide these surveys to accurately reflect where effort in the fishery will be occurring. Participants in the commercial mechanical oyster fishery should anticipate the opportunity to provide input and coordinates to NCDMF staff to be used in the pre-season survey to establish season length, and again in the mid-season survey to potentially extend the mechanical season.

Phase out of mechanical clam harvest

The adoption of Amendment 3 to the Hard Clam FMP included phasing out mechanical clam harvest over a three-year period ending in May 2028. Approaching that time, the rulemaking process will be initiated to amend NCMFC rules 15A NCAC 03K .0301 and .0302 such that mechanical clam harvest on public bottom, both in conjunction with maintenance dredging and during designated open seasons and areas, will not be permitted as of June 1, 2028. Mechanical clam harvest will continue to be allowed for a private lease that has the proper aquaculture permits in place.

Estimating recreational shellfish harvest

Both Amendment 3 to the Hard Clam FMP and Amendment 5 to the Oyster FMP included support for exploring options and developing a solution to estimate recreational shellfish participation and landings and developing a mechanism to provide all recreational shellfish harvesters with Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality health and safety information. In support of this management strategy, in July 2025 the Division formed an internal workgroup to explore possible options, including a license or permit. Some options would require legislative action for implementation.