

Director's Report

November 2025 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Rule Suspensions Memo

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management
Council Meeting Report

South Atlantic Fishery Management
Council Meeting Report

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries
Commission Meeting Report



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Governor

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Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

October 30, 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 August 2025 meeting.

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-22-2025](#).

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



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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](#).

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



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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](#).

August 2025 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met August 11-14, 2025, in Annapolis, MD. 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 [August 2025 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Approved a list of recommendations for submission in response to Executive Order 14276 on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.
- Adopted 2026–2027 specifications for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. *
- Reviewed an SSC white paper on sector-specific OFLs and ABCs and agreed not to prioritize development of this concept at this time. *
- Reviewed draft conceptual alternatives and preliminary analysis for the Recreational Sector Separation Amendment and removed two options from further consideration. *
- Maintained status quo 2026–2028 *Illex* squid specifications and received results from the collaborative SQUIBS longfin squid biological sampling program.
- Agreed to form a joint subcommittee with SAFMC on blueline tilefish allocation north of Cape Hatteras while moving forward with 2026 specifications approved in June.
- Initiated a framework to consider modifications to the Atlantic mackerel rebuilding approach.
- Welcomed three new Council members and one reappointed member.
- Elected Joe Cimino as Council Chair and Skip Feller as Council Vice Chair.

** Items denoted with an asterisk (*) were undertaken during joint meetings with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Management Board, Bluefish Management Board, or ISFMP Policy Board.*

Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness

The Council discussed [Executive Order \(EO\) 14276 on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness](#) and approved a list of recommended actions for submission to the Secretary of Commerce, as required under Section 4 of the EO. The actions are intended to address the EO objectives of reducing burdens and increasing production within U.S. fisheries. Specifically, the recommendations should “stabilize markets, improve access, enhance profitability, and prevent fishery closures.” During the meeting, the Council considered public comments and reviewed a staff options paper describing new and ongoing actions that may be responsive to EO 14276. The Council approved twenty recommended actions covering a broad range of topics. A summary of these recommendations is available [here](#). Staff is preparing the Council's formal response for submission to NMFS prior to the September 30 deadline.

Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Specifications

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) to set 2026-2027 specifications and commercial measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The Council also met jointly with the Commission's Bluefish Management Board to set 2026-2027 specifications and recreational measures for bluefish. The table below summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for all four species (2025 values are provided for comparison). The Council will forward its recommendations to NOAA Fisheries for final approval, while the Commission's actions for state waters are final. See the sections below the table for additional details about the recommendations for each species.

	Commercial Quota <i>millions of pounds</i>			Recreational Harvest Limit <i>millions of pounds</i>		
	2025	2026	2027	2025	2026	2027
Summer Flounder	8.79	12.78	12.78	6.35	8.79	8.79
Scup	19.54	17.70	15.57	12.31	13.17	11.58
Black Sea Bass	5.00	7.83	7.83	6.27	8.14	8.14
Bluefish	3.03	4.66	4.75	15.70	22.02	22.50

Summer Flounder 2026-2027 Specifications

The 2025 management track assessment found that summer flounder was not overfished, and overfishing was no longer occurring in 2024. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 83% of the biomass target. The Council and Board considered varying Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) limits as well as a constant ABC across 2026-2027. After reviewing SSC recommendations under both approaches, they selected the SSC-recommended constant ABC approach. This results in an ABC of 30.01 million pounds for both years – a 55% increase compared to the 2025 ABC.

Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 55% of the ABC is allocated to the commercial sector and 45% is allocated to the recreational sector. During the discussion, Council and Board members discussed the large volatility in summer flounder ABCs over the past decade, noting that sharp increases have often been followed by sharp decreases. They also noted the continued below average recruitment, and concerns about management uncertainty and stability. After much discussion, the Council and Board adopted a 12% management uncertainty buffer for both sectors to be deducted from the sector-specific annual catch limits (ACL) to derive the annual catch targets (ACT).

After applying the buffer and accounting for each sector's expected dead discards, the Council and Board adopted a commercial quota of 12.78 million pounds and an RHL of 8.79 million pounds for 2026 and 2027. They agreed that no changes are needed to the commercial management measures, which include a 14" minimum fish size, minimum mesh size (5.5" diamond or 6.0" square mesh), and mesh exemption programs. Recreational bag, size, and season limits for upcoming years will be discussed during the December 2025 Council and Board meeting.

Scup 2026-2027 Specifications

The 2025 management track assessment found that scup was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring in 2024. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 3.23 times the biomass target. For 2026, the Council and Board approved an ABC of 42.09 million pounds, a 2% increase compared to the 2025 ABC. For 2027, they approved an ABC of 37.01 million pounds.

Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 65% of the ABC is allocated to the commercial sector and 35% is allocated to the recreational sector. No deductions were made in either sector to account for management uncertainty. After accounting for each sector's expected dead discards, the 2026 ABC results in a commercial quota of 17.70 million pounds and an RHL of 13.17 million pounds. The 2027 ABC results in a commercial quota of 15.57 million pounds and an RHL of 11.58 million pounds. The Council and Board agreed that no changes are needed to the commercial management measures which can be modified through the specifications process. Recreational bag, size, and season limits for upcoming years will be discussed during the December 2025 Council and Board meeting.

Black Sea Bass 2026-2027 Specifications

The 2025 management track assessment found that black sea bass was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring in 2024. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 2.84 times the biomass target. The Council and Board approved an ABC of 21.34 million pounds for both 2026 and 2027, a 28% increase compared to the 2024-2025 ABC.

Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 45% of the ABC is allocated to the commercial sector and 55% is allocated to the recreational sector. No deductions were made in either sector to account for management uncertainty. After accounting for each sector's expected dead discards, the resulting commercial quota for 2026 and 2027 is 7.83 million pounds (a 31% increase compared to 2024-2025), and the resulting RHL for 2026 and 2027 is 8.14 million pounds (a 30% increase).

The Council and Board adopted a 5% in-season commercial closure buffer for 2025, meaning the commercial fishery will close if 105% of the quota is projected to be landed prior to the end of the year. They made no changes to any other federal commercial management measures. Recreational bag, size, and season limits for 2026-2027 will be considered during the December 2025 Council and Board meeting.

Bluefish 2026-2027 Specifications and Recreational Measures

The 2025 management track assessment for bluefish concluded that overfishing was not occurring in 2024, and while the stock was not overfished, it has not yet fully rebuilt to the biomass target reference point. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 89% of the biomass target. The stock is projected to be rebuilt in 2025; however, since this is a projection, the stock will not be considered rebuilt until a future stock assessment determines that the rebuilding target has been achieved.

Based on the SSC's recommendation, the Council and Bluefish Board approved an ABC of 44.61 million pounds for 2026 and 45.41 million pounds for 2027. Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 86% of the ABC is allocated to the recreational sector and 14% to the commercial sector. After considerable debate, the Council and Bluefish Board adopted management uncertainty buffers of 25% for the commercial sector and 30% for the recreational sector. These buffers, applied to the sector-specific annual catch limits to derive the annual catch targets, are intended to prevent management volatility and ensure the continued rebuilding of the stock. Council and Board members also noted that the upcoming changes to the MRIP estimates are a significant source of uncertainty. After applying the buffers and accounting for expected discards, the Council and Board adopted a commercial quota of 4.66 million pounds and an RHL of 22.02 million pounds for 2026, and a commercial quota of 4.75 million pounds and an RHL of 22.50 million pounds for 2027. Compared to 2025, these values represent increases of approximately 50% for the commercial quota and 40% for the RHL.

Recreational measures for bluefish were also modified for 2026 and 2027, with the private recreational bag limit increasing from 3 to 5 fish and the for-hire bag limit increasing from 5 to 7 fish.

SSC White Paper on Sector-Specific OFLs and ABCs for Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

At the direction of the Council, the SSC developed a [white paper](#) titled “Scientific Considerations of Developing Separate OFLs and ABCs for the Commercial and Recreational Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fisheries.” The Council and the Commission’s Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board reviewed the final white paper and discussed next steps.

The Council tasked the SSC with development of this white paper in response to concerns from commercial fishery representatives that the current process for setting overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catch limits (ABCs) creates the potential for overages in the recreational fishery to negatively impact the commercial fishery. The white paper demonstrated that a purely scientific basis for allocating ABCs by sector can be developed. However, these allocations would differ from the current commercial/recreational allocations and would likely change with each assessment update. A considerable amount of additional analytical work would be needed to more fully develop the concepts in the white paper and there would be a number of both foreseeable and unforeseeable effects.

The Council and Board agreed that the white paper is valuable for better understanding the implications of sector-specific OFLs and ABCs. However, they decided not to prioritize further development of this concept at this time. They noted it may be more appropriate to consider if sector-specific management uncertainty buffers can address the concerns that lead to development of this white paper. The Council and Board agreed to consider how to best further consider this topic while balancing other priorities during upcoming discussions on the Council’s 2026 Implementation Plan and the Commission’s 2026 Action Plan.

Recreational Sector Separation Amendment

The Council met jointly with the Commission’s Interstate Fishery Management Plan Policy Board (Policy Board) to review draft conceptual alternatives and preliminary analysis for the [Recreational Sector Separation Amendment](#). This amendment considers options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes, as well as options related to for-hire permit and reporting requirements.

The Council and Policy Board removed two approaches from further consideration:

- 1) Separate allocations under recreational sector separation – These options were removed due to concerns about extending the amendment timeline and adding complexity to the fishery management plans, as well as concerns about uncertainty in the mode-specific data that would inform separate allocations.
- 2) Temporary limitations on the ability to renew inactive federal for-hire permits – This conceptual alternative was removed due to concerns that it would not address the needs of this action and that permit inactivity can be driven by regional and temporal variations in availability.

The Fishery Management Action Team/Plan Development Team (FMAT/PDT) will continue to develop a draft range of alternatives for the remaining approaches for tentative Council and Policy Board approval in December.

The Council and Policy Board also received an update on a plan for developing a white paper on the recreational data collection issues that were previously removed from this amendment. The purpose of the white paper is to clarify the relevant problem statements and objectives, and to assess the feasibility of various approaches for addressing concerns with recreational data collection and use. Staff expects to develop this white paper in 2026, with tentative plans to present a draft outline to the Council and Policy Board in early 2026.

2026-2028 *Illex* Squid Specifications

The Council set 2026-2028 *Illex* squid specifications, maintaining the status quo from 2025. Although the *Illex* stock status remains unknown, a variety of analyses suggest the stock is generally lightly exploited. The quota would stay at 38,631 MT, based on maintaining a 40,000 MT ABC and a 1,369 MT deduction for estimated discards.

SQUIBS Longfin Squid Data Collection Program

Dr. Anna Mercer, Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Cooperative Research Branch Chief, highlighted the results of the Longfin Squid Biological Sampling Program (SQUIBS). Between April 2023 and June 2025, this research engaged 32 fishing vessels in collecting 24,474 longfin squid for biological analysis and aging. Data from SQUIBS advanced understanding of longfin squid life history and assisted development of novel squid stock assessment approaches, demonstrating the power of collaborative research for advancing scientific understanding.

SAFMC Blueline Tilefish Request

The Council discussed a recent request from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) to form a joint subcommittee to address how the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for blueline tilefish north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina should be apportioned between the two Councils.

The most recent assessment for blueline tilefish (SEDAR 92) split the stock at Cape Hatteras, NC. The region north of Cape Hatteras includes a portion of the blueline stock managed by the SAFMC as well as the full management unit managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council. Following SEDAR 92, leadership from both Councils agreed on a process for setting catch and landing limits in their jurisdictions. This process included formation of a joint SSC subgroup to recommend an ABC for the stock north of Cape Hatteras. The sub-group also provided a method for apportioning the stock between regions, resulting in a recommended allocation of 70% of the ABC to the area north of the North Carolina/Virginia border and 30% to the area south.

At the June 2025 meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council approved blueline tilefish specifications for 2026 based on the recommended 70/30 split. When these recommendations were reviewed at the June 2025 SAFMC meeting, members raised concerns with both the basis of the allocation and the fact that the decision was made by a technical group without Council involvement. The SAFMC subsequently sent a letter to the Mid-Atlantic Council proposing the creation of a joint sub-committee, including members of both Councils, to collaboratively determine how the ABC should be divided.

At this meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council agreed to support the formation of such a joint Council subcommittee to help inform future specifications. Council members emphasized the importance of continued coordination with the SAFMC, given that blueline tilefish is a single stock along the Atlantic coast. The Council also recommended moving forward with the 2026 specifications approved at the [June meeting](#), noting that they were developed through a mutually agreed-upon process, supported by a joint SSC recommendation, and reflect the best scientific information available. Moving forward with these specifications will ensure timely submission of the final package to NMFS and provide effective management for the upcoming fishing year.

Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding

Under New Business, and in response to public comment, the Council agreed to consider modifications to the Atlantic mackerel rebuilding plan. The current rebuilding plan, which has been in place since 2023, has a 61% probability of rebuilding the stock by 2032. The proposed modification will consider an alternative rebuilding path that maintains at least a 50% probability of rebuilding by 2032 while allowing for more fishery yield in upcoming years than the current approach would provide (both depend on pending assessment). The Council

was already scheduled to set specifications for upcoming years at its December 2025 meeting. The Council agreed to utilize a framework adjustment to integrate consideration of the revised rebuilding approach into the planned specifications-setting. An initial review will take place at the October 2025 Council Meeting, with final action expected in December 2025.

Other Business

New and Reappointed Council Members

Three newly appointed members were sworn in to begin three-year terms on the Council: Elizibeth "Lisa" Wooleyhan (Delaware), Todd Janeski (Virginia), Jake Wiscott (New Jersey). In addition, reappointed Council member Scott Lenox (Maryland) was sworn in for his third term.

Officer Elections

During the yearly election of officers, the Council elected Joe Cimino as Chair and Skip Feller as Vice Chair. Mr. Cimino is the Administrator of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Marine Resources Administration. He has served as New Jersey's designated state official since 2018. Mr. Feller is currently in his second term as an appointed member holding Virginia's obligatory seat. He operates a fleet of head boats out of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Upcoming Meetings

The next Council meeting will be held **October 7-9, 2025**, in Philadelphia, PA. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.

October 2025 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met October 7-9, 2025, in Philadelphia, PA. 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 [October 2025 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Postponed final action on the Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking Framework until additional information is available to inform decision making
- Took final action on the Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures and 2026-2027 Specifications Framework, keeping the commercial quota nearly the same as 2025
- Approved a public hearing document for the Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment
- Reviewed a draft range of alternatives for the Recreational Tilefish Reporting Framework and recommended several modifications
- Reviewed a draft range of alternatives for the Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding and 2026-2027 Specifications Framework
- Adopted status-quo 2026-2028 monkfish specifications and effort controls
- Endorsed the monkfish provisions of the New England Council's Management Flexibility Amendment
- Received updates on habitat activities of interest in the Mid-Atlantic region
- Received an update on recent Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) actions, including improvements to the Fishing Effort Survey
- Received an update on the Atlantic Coast Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensation Program
- Reviewed and provided feedback on proposed actions and deliverables for the 2026 Implementation Plan (Executive Committee)

Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking Framework

The Council met to consider taking final action on the Joint Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking Framework. This action, which was developed in collaboration with the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) and the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO), considers revisions to current gear marking regulations to allow for the optional use of alternative gear marking in fixed gear fisheries (i.e., trap/pot and gillnet) in the Greater Atlantic Region. This could provide increased fishing access for fishermen in areas closed to persistent buoy lines under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (TRP). Currently, these persistent buoy line closures only apply to the American lobster and Jonah crab trap/pot fishery. However, future modifications to the TRP could create new persistent buoy line restricted areas for other fisheries. Revised gear-marking regulations could allow increased fishing access in the future for fixed-gear fishermen for all fisheries within the TRP restricted areas. This action would not limit the use of current gear-marking methods and would not require the use of gear-marking alternatives or on-demand gear.

After reviewing public comments and receiving an update from the Plan Development Team/Fishery Management Action Team (PDT/FMAT), the Council voted to delay final action on the framework until additional information on ropeless gear and visualization technology, as solicited through a NOAA Fisheries Request for

Information (RFI), is available to better inform stakeholder input and Council decision-making. The Council's motion to postpone final action mirrored a similar motion passed by the New England Fishery Management Council at their September 2025 meeting. The GARFO Regional Administrator indicated that NOAA Fisheries plans to issue an RFI in 2026 to solicit public input on various questions pertaining to alternative gear marking and the approval of certain systems for use. Updates on this action can be found [here](#).

Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures and Specifications Framework

The Council took final action on a framework action to set 2026-2027 spiny dogfish specifications and modify some accountability measures. Because spiny dogfish are jointly managed by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils, both Councils must approve the framework for it to take effect. The New England Fishery Management Council will consider taking final action at their December 2025 meeting.

Specifications: The spiny dogfish stock is projected to be at 113% of its biomass target in 2026. Based on advice from its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Council adopted constant 2026-2027 specifications with the same Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) limit as 2025. The Council decided it was appropriate to set aside slightly more for discards, which will reduce the commercial quota from 2025's 9.3 million pounds to 9.2 million pounds for 2026-2027. No changes were recommended to other measures, such as the federal trip limit.

Accountability Measures: Currently, the Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) requires strict pound-for-pound payback of any Annual Catch Limit (ACL) overages as an accountability measure. Under the revised measures adopted by the Council, ACL overages would be calculated using a 3-year average of catch compared to a 3-year average of ACLs. This approach is intended to smooth out annual variability in landings and discards to reduce the likelihood of overages resulting from short-term fluctuations and/or imprecise estimates. In addition, payback amounts would scale with biomass levels as follows:

- **At or above target biomass:** No payback would be required for ACL overages. However, the Councils would still consider management adjustments during the next specifications cycle to prevent future overages.
- **At or below 75% of target biomass:** Full, pound-for-pound paybacks would be required and deducted from the next available single-year ACL.
- **Between 75% and 100% of target biomass:** The payback amount would be calculated on a sliding, linear scale based on biomass level (for example, a 50% payback would be required when the stock is at 87.5% of the target biomass).

This change is intended to better align accountability measures with stock status and reduce unnecessary economic impacts when the stock is healthy. However, this flexibility would not apply while a rebuilding plan is in place, and full paybacks would still be required until the stock is rebuilt. The Council also voted to allow specifications to include a landings closure threshold of up to 105% of the quota if biomass is greater than 50% of the target. This measure is intended to reduce negative economic impacts of coastwide closures on states that have not fully harvested their quotas. Updates on this action can be found [here](#).

Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment

The Council reviewed and approved a public hearing document for the Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment. This action proposes revisions to the EFH designations for 14 of the Council's managed species. After reviewing input from its Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Committee and EOP Advisory Panel, the Council approved the document for public comment and hearings and identified Alternative 2 as the Council's preferred alternative. A schedule of public hearings, along with instructions for submitting written comments,

will be available on the Council website in the coming weeks. The Council will consider final action on the Amendment at its meeting in April 2026. Updates on this action can be found [here](#).

Recreational Tilefish Reporting Framework

The Council reviewed a draft range of alternatives for the Recreational Tilefish Reporting Framework. This action considers options to streamline and simplify reporting requirements for recreational tilefish anglers, with the goals of improving compliance, reducing the reporting burden, increasing enforceability of regulations, and improving the accuracy and reliability of self-reported data. Currently, anglers fishing for golden and blueline tilefish north of the North Carolina/Virginia border are required to submit electronic vessel trip reports (eVTR) for every trip where tilefish were caught or targeted. These requirements, implemented in 2020, were intended to improve the accuracy and reliability of recreational catch and effort estimates. However, a program evaluation conducted in 2024 highlighted a number of issues that have contributed to persistently low compliance and reporting rates.

The range of alternatives presented to the Council includes options that would (1) eliminate certain reporting fields, (2) eliminate the requirement to report effort-only trips (i.e., trips with no tilefish landings or discards), and (3) revise the trip report submission timeframe. These alternatives were developed based on the outcomes and recommendations of the 2024 program evaluation. The Council provided feedback on the range of alternatives and requested that staff add an alternative that would maintain the requirement to report catch location information (e.g., latitude/longitude or statistical area). The Council also requested that staff evaluate the feasibility and utility of adding a requirement to report tilefish length and weight information.

The modified range of alternatives will be further developed, and a public input meeting will be held in early 2026 to gather stakeholder feedback on the range of alternatives. Final action by the Council is tentatively planned for April 2026. Updates on this action can be found [here](#).

Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding and Specifications Framework

The Council reviewed a draft range of alternatives for a framework action to modify the Atlantic mackerel rebuilding plan and set 2026-2027 specifications. Directed commercial fishing for Atlantic mackerel has been negligible since October 12, 2023, when very low trip limits and quotas were established to facilitate rebuilding. It appears that improving recruitment in 2022 and 2023 was followed by a large terminal year recruitment event in 2024. However, the preceding three terminal year recruitment estimates (2016, 2019, and 2022) were later revised down, by -30%, -62%, and -23% respectively.

Depending on the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) advice on potentially adjusting the terminal year recruitment estimate, catch limits for 2026-2027 may increase. The Council instructed staff to refine a range of approaches for 2026-2027 to continue rebuilding based on the SSC's recommendations made during an upcoming [October 23, 2025 SSC webinar meeting](#). The Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Committee and River Herring and Shad Committee will meet jointly on November 24 to make recommendations for final action at the Council's December 2025 meeting. Updates on this action can be found [here](#).

Monkfish 2026-2028 Specifications

Mirroring action in New England for this jointly-managed fishery, the Council recommended maintaining current overall catch limits for both the northern and southern monkfish management areas, with no changes to existing days-at-sea or possession limits. The total allowable landings (TAL) for the northern area will decline by about 3% due to updated discard estimates (to 5,174 metric tons); the southern area TAL would be nearly unchanged (3,487 metric tons).

NEFMC Management Flexibility Framework – Monkfish Provisions

The Council endorsed the monkfish provisions of an omnibus [amendment](#) developed by the New England Fishery Management Council to improve flexibility and consistency across their fishery management plans. If approved and implemented, this action would: allow specifications to be set for up to five years through a simpler “specs action” without requiring development of a framework adjustment; enable NOAA Fisheries to adjust specifications or measures during the year in consultation with the Council; remove certain annual reporting requirements to reduce administrative workload; and expand the list of measures that can be updated through framework adjustments.

Habitat Update

NOAA Fisheries GARFO Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division (HESD) provided information, presented by Council staff, on habitat activities of interest to the Council. This included several port development, energy, federal navigation, and civil work projects within the Mid-Atlantic. The status of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Historic Area Remediation site considerations and U.S. Coast Guard work with HESD on their “Shipping Safety Fairways Along the Atlantic Coast” was noted. HESD highlighted work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the reissuance of the Nationwide permits and new and upcoming work to facilitate efficient and effective EFH consultations (i.e., training, technical assistance, and a new EFH assessment worksheet). Lastly, it was noted that early discussions are occurring with a proposed mussel aquaculture project (i.e., Newport Mussels) in Southern New England.

Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Update

Council staff provided an overview of ongoing improvements to the survey methods used to create recreational fishing catch estimates. In particular, NOAA Fisheries is preparing to transition to a modified Fishing Effort mail-based Survey (the “FES”). Based on 2024 side-by-side surveys, NOAA Fisheries’ analyses suggest the modified survey results in approximately 10%-20% lower effort estimates, which would translate into similar reductions in catch estimates. Catch reductions will vary by species, with relatively bigger reductions for species caught primarily in private boat fishing vs shore fishing, and relatively bigger reductions for species that are caught primarily in off-peak activity months. For most species, it appears the scale of downward changes will be less than the upward changes that occurred with the original FES implementation in 2018.

Older estimates will have to be calibrated (lowered) to match the new methods, and then the new time series can be incorporated into assessments as they occur (and then into management). Lowering the catch history going into an assessment often results in lower projected future yields, so the overall impact on recreational management measures (seasons, size limits, possession limits) is not yet clear. NOAA Fisheries and management partners are developing a transition plan that would provide a framework for considering related issues, including assessment prioritization and the need for potential re-consideration of allocations that were based upon historic estimates.

Staff also provided updates on MRIP’s efforts to improve engagement with partners and constituents, from long-term goals to enhanced review of preliminary estimates. Staff also reviewed upcoming [research efforts in the Gulf of America focused on cutting-edge recreational data collection methods](#), including video, satellite, aerial survey, and mobile data.

The best way to stay informed about MRIP activities is to sign up for [NOAA Fisheries email updates](#) or email fisheries.mrip@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Coast Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensation Program

The Council received an update on a regional offshore wind fisheries compensation program, which is currently in development and could be used across multiple future offshore wind energy projects. More information is available at <https://www.rfainfo.com/>.

Executive Committee: 2026 Implementation Plan

The Executive Committee met to review and provide feedback on a draft list of actions and deliverables for the 2026 Implementation Plan. The Council develops Implementation Plans each year to ensure progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of its 5-year strategic plan. During the meeting, the Committee received a progress update on the 2026 Implementation Plan and reviewed a draft list of actions and deliverables for 2026. The Committee recommended several modifications to the list. The full Council will review a draft 2026 Implementation Plan at the December meeting.

Other Business

50th Anniversary: Staff provided an update on planned communications and outreach for the 50th anniversary of the regional fishery management councils in 2026. The strategy focuses on celebrating the Council's history, raising public awareness, and engaging stakeholders. Planned activities and deliverables include a dedicated landing page on the Council website, an interactive timeline of key milestones, and a series of articles featuring management milestones from the Council's history and interviews with Council process participants. Staff also plan to host a photo contest in early 2026, inviting submissions that capture Mid-Atlantic fisheries, coastal communities, habitats, and working waterfronts. Winning photos will be showcased online and in other communications.

Role of Monitoring Committees: The Council reviewed a staff [memo](#) summarizing the role of the Monitoring Committees in the specifications setting process. Monitoring Committees review and recommend to the Council many different types of catch and landings limits and other management measures. The Monitoring Committees are specifically tasked with considering management uncertainty when making recommendations for Annual Catch Targets; however, they can also consider scientific uncertainty, optimum yield, and other factors when making all their recommendations. The memo describes several recent examples of Annual Catch Targets set less than the Annual Catch Limits for a variety of reasons. The Council is not bound by the recommendations of the Monitoring Committees and can adopt different specifications (higher or lower) provided they are consistent with the FMPs, the Magnuson Act, and other applicable laws.

Inflation Reduction Act Updates: The Council reviewed newly developed one-page overviews for the Council's eight projects supported by Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds intended to help support the development and enhancement of climate-related fisheries management efforts. This new communication tool provides easy-to-read, high level information about each project's purpose, objectives, and general timeline. These one-page project overviews and additional IRA information can be found at: <https://www.mafmc.org/ira-projects>.

Executive Order 14276, *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*: The [Council's response](#) to Executive Order 14276 was submitted on September 30, 2025. It included a total of 20 recommended actions to help stabilize markets, improve access, enhance profitability, and prevent fishery closures.

Next Council Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held **December 15-18, 2025**, in Washington, DC. 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
September 25, 2025

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Council Addresses Broad Range of Federal Fishery Issues During September Meeting

Executive Orders, options for state management of Red Snapper, increases in Blueline Tilefish catch limits, and measures for Black Sea Bass included in week-long meeting

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met this past week in North Charleston, South Carolina, to address federal fishery management issues in the South Atlantic region. During the week-long meeting, the Council reviewed public input received relative to Executive Order 14276 *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*. The Council began discussion of the Executive Order during its June 2025 meeting and solicited online public comment from July 28 through August 15, 2025, as well as input from its advisory panels via a virtual meeting held on August 11th.

Executive Order 14276

Each of the eight regional fishery management councils must provide a letter to the Secretary of Commerce outlining actions underway or planned, to address the directives of the Executive Order. Council members reviewed a summary of topics provided by the public and its advisory panels and decided to focus initially on actions already underway to help ensure their timely completion as directed in the EO. These include:

- Removing or considering ecosystem component designation for several species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP). There are currently 55 species within the FMP.
- Addressing commercial federal permit issues and improving commercial trip efficiency through Amendment 60 to the Snapper Grouper FMP.
- Supporting development of Exempted Fishing Permit applications from the four South Atlantic states to explore state management of the recreational Red Snapper fishery.

The response to the Executive Order will also note the Council's work to increase stakeholder engagement, acknowledging that stakeholder input is a fundamental component of the Council process. Recommendations that NOAA Fisheries prioritize items under their purview will also be included in the response. These include continuing data collection (e.g., dockside sampling) and conducting more timely stock assessments in the South Atlantic region and eliminating the prohibition of shark fin sales due to its negative impacts on fishing businesses and potential contribution to depredation.

State Management of Recreational Red Snapper

During the meeting week, the Council held an informational session on joint state-federal management that included presentations on multiple topics. NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional office and the Gulf Council addressed regulatory procedures and their roles in implementing state-based management of Red Snapper in the Gulf of America. A state perspective was provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and a broader Atlantic perspective by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Council Addresses Broad Range of Issues (continued)

The Council discussed issues to be addressed if joint state-federal management of Red Snapper is considered in the South Atlantic. A list highlighting discussion topics and questions is available from the [Full Council 1 Summary Report](#). The Council agreed to start developing a plan amendment for state management of recreational Red Snapper. Each state will initially develop and submit Exempted Fishing Permit applications to NOAA Fisheries to begin exploring the concept. Presentations on the state's proposals are scheduled for the December 2025 Council meeting, when discussion on next steps will continue.

Increasing Blueline Tilefish Catch Limits

Following the latest stock assessment for Atlantic Blueline Tilefish (SEDAR 92), completed in March 2025, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee provided the Council with an updated Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) level that would allow an increase in harvest. The stock assessment includes Blueline Tilefish found within both the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils' jurisdictions.

In order to implement new catch limits for Blueline Tilefish for the 2026 fishing season, the South Atlantic Council is preparing Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 to adopt the recommended ABC and establish a total annual catch limit. Jurisdictional allocations and other management measures will be addressed in a future amendment. A public hearing will be held during the Council's December 2025 meeting in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Black Sea Bass

The Council continued work on Regulatory Amendment 37 to quickly implement measures to address the continuing decline in the Black Sea Bass stock in the South Atlantic. Additional actions will be considered through Amendment 56 to the Snapper Grouper FMP.

The regulatory amendment proposes changes to minimum size limits, reductions in the recreational bag limit, and a spawning season closure for both commercial and recreational sectors with a minimum closure of two months. Regulatory Amendment 37 would establish recreational and commercial annual catch targets (ACTs) equal to 50% of the average landings from 2019-2023. The Council would reconsider the ACTs and associated measures two years after implementation. Virtual public hearings for Regulatory Amendment 37 will be held prior to the Council's December meeting. Additional details will be provided as they become available.

Additional information about the Council's September 2025 meeting, including individual reports from committee meetings and meetings of the Full Council, are available from the Council's website at: <https://safmc.net/events/september-2025-council-meeting/>. The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for December 8-12, 2025, in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

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.
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Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ASMFC 2025 Annual Meeting

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

ASMFC 2025 Annual Meeting
October 27 - 30, 2025

For more information, please
contact Toni Kerns, ISFMP,
Tina Berger, Communications
or the identified individual at
703.842.0740

Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

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ATLANTIC COASTAL COOPERATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM COORDINATING COUNCIL (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The ACCSP Coordinating Council met to consider the FY2026 Partner and Administrative proposals. Due to uncertainty about FY2026 funding levels, the Council moved to support the ACCSP administrative grant, up to five (5) maintenance proposals and two to three new proposals as ranked and recommended by the Advisory and Operations Committees. Exact project selection will depend on the total funding ACCSP receives, and the ability of individual projects to adapt to partial funding. The Council noted appreciation to the Operations and Advisors on the work done to rank proposals and provide thoughtful recommendations to utilize available funding.

The Council received updates on ACCSP program activities, including status of funding for prior approved projects, recreational data collection initiatives, software development timelines, biological module data load projects into the ACCSP Data Warehouse, and implementation of limited confidential access approval process.

For more information, please contact Geoff White, ACCSP Director, at Geoff.white@accsp.org.

Motions

Move to approve the funding proposal recommendations by the operations and advisory committee as proposed today.

Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Grist. Motion approved by consent.

ATLANTIC COASTAL FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP STEERING COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 27 & 28)

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) Steering Committee convened its Fall 2025 meeting to discuss ongoing and emerging partnership initiatives, project updates, and future planning efforts. The meeting included updates on National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) activities, review of current and recently completed ACFHP-funded projects, and discussion of strategies to enhance partner engagement and long-term support for restoration, including the development of new outreach materials.

Guest presentations included Leah Morgan of the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, who discussed the organization's oyster shell recycling program, and Alison Rogerson of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) Watershed Stewardship Division, who presented on beneficial use dredging projects in the Indian River. The Committee also discussed ongoing efforts to plan the 2026 Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Workshop and Guidance Document, updates to the project monitoring survey, and partner outreach priorities for the upcoming year.

A field visit to DNREC's new SAV facility in Lewes, Delaware, provided an opportunity to learn about current and planned restoration efforts and innovative SAV propagation techniques.

Key outcomes:

- Welcoming Tim Ellis (Quantitative Ecologist, Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership) as a new Steering Committee member.

- Review and discussion of the updated ACFHP Business Plan.
- Continued planning for the 2026 SAV Workshop, focusing on *Zostera marina* and *Ruppia spp.* restoration, monitoring, and management.
- Identification of opportunities to leverage NFHP's 20th Anniversary for increased partner engagement and communications.
- Discussion of potential new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) partners, including the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Coastal Conservation Association, National Wildlife Federation, and Delaware Center for the Inland Bays.
- Consideration of opportunities to support early-career professionals by sponsoring participation in future ACFHP meetings.
- For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

For more information, please contact Simen Kaalstad, ACFHP Director, at skaalstad@asmfc.org.

ATLANTIC HERRING MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Herring Management Board met to set quota periods for the 2026 Area 1A fishery; review the draft Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review for fishing year 2024, state compliance and *de minimis* request; and elect a Vice-Chair.

The Board considered quota periods for the 2026 Area 1A fishery. Per Amendment 3 to the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Herring, quota periods shall be determined annually for Area 1A. The Board can consider distributing the Area 1A sub-ACL using bi-monthly, trimester, or seasonal quota periods. The Board can also decide whether quota from January through May will be allocated later in the fishing season, and underages may be rolled from one period to the next within the same year. For the 2026 Area 1A fishery, the Board adopted a seasonal quota approach with 72.8% available June-September and 27.2% available October-December with underages from June through September rolled into the October through December period, if applicable. These 2026 quota periods are the same as the quota periods implemented for the last six fishing years.

The Board approved the Atlantic Herring FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* request for New York. In 2024, all states implemented management measures consistent with the FMP. The Board also discussed the short-term recommendation from the Plan Review Team that the Board consider long-term funding to support continuation of the Maine Department of Marine Resources portside sampling program, which requires funding for sample collection in states outside of Maine. The portside sampling program is an important data source informing management and the Atlantic herring stock assessment model. A call will be scheduled for the Administrative Commissioners on the Board to discuss potential long-term funding and/or the ability for states to potentially collect their own samples and send them to Maine DMR for processing.

Finally, the Board elected Eric Reid from Rhode Island as the Vice-Chair. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to implement seasonal distribution of quota for the 2026 Area 1A sub-ACL with 72.8% available from June through September and 27.2% allocated from October through December, with no landings

prior to June 1. Underages will be rolled over into the next quota period. The fishery will close when 92% of the seasonal period's quota is projected to be caught.

Motion made by Ms. Ware and seconded by Ms. Zobel. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the Atlantic Herring FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* request for New York.

Motion made by Mr. Kaelin and seconded by Mr. Gates. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to elect Eric Reid as Vice-Chair.

Motion made by Ms. Ware and second by Mr. Kane. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

TAUTOG MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Press Release

Tautog Regional Assessments Update Shows Varied Stock Status by Region

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's Tautog Management Board reviewed the results of 2025 Regional Stock Assessments Update, which found stock status varied by region. Tautog were not overfished in the Massachusetts-Rhode Island (MARI), Long Island Sound (LIS), and New Jersey and New York Bight (NJ/NYB) regions, but were overfished in the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) region. Tautog were not experiencing overfishing in the MARI or LIS regions but were experiencing overfishing in the NJ-NYB region and DMV region.

Table 1. Stock status of tautog in the MARI, LIS, NJ-NYB, and DMV regions.

Region	Spawning Stock Biomass			Status
	Target	Threshold	2024	
MARI	6,143 mt	4,595 mt	9,572 mt	Not overfished
LIS	9,799 mt	7,349 mt	13,718 mt	Not overfished
NJ-NYB	7,910 mt	5,929 mt	7,900	Not overfished
DMV	4,400 mt	3,236 mt	2,687 mt	Overfished
<i>Retrospective adjustment applied to SSB for all regions</i>				

Region	Fishing Mortality			Status
	Target	Threshold	2024	
MARI	0.27	0.46	0.26	Not overfishing
LIS	0.25	0.35	0.25	Not overfishing
NJ-NYB	0.20	0.33	0.44	Overfishing
DMV	0.18	0.29	0.36	Overfishing
<i>Retrospective adjustment applied to F for all regions.</i>				

Stock status did not change for the MARI or LIS regions from the 2021 update but did change for the NJ-NYB and DMV regions. The NJ-NYB region went from being overfished but not experiencing overfishing in the 2021 update to not being overfished but experiencing overfishing in this update. The DMV region was previously not overfished or experiencing overfishing but was considered overfished and experiencing overfishing in the 2025 update.

All regions showed patterns in fishing mortality and spawning stock biomass (SSB), with MARI, LIS, and NJ-NYB assessments overestimating fishing mortality and underestimating SSB, while the pattern was reversed in the DMV region, compared to the 2021 update. Based on the [Commission's policy](#), the Stock Assessment Subcommittee adjusted both fishing mortality and SSB for all regions to account for this pattern, which changed stock status for some regions.

Since the 2021 update, recruitment has increased in the LIS and NJ-NYB regions, and MARI shows a slight increase in SSB. In the DMV, fishing mortality had been low since 2012 before reaching a peak in 2021 followed by a sharp decline thereafter. Total removals have increased in all regions, driven primarily by increases in recreational harvest.

In response to the assessment findings, the Board initiated an addendum to address changes in stock status for NJ/NYB and DMV. The Draft Addendum will also consider allowing for the MARI and LIS regions to modify management for precautionary or alignment purposes.

The 2025 Regional Stock Assessments Update as well as a detailed overview of the update will be available at <https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-menhaden/> under News and Resources. For more information on the update, please contact Katie Drew, Stock Assessment Team Lead, at kdrew@asmfc.org; and for more information on tautog management, please contact James Boyle, FMP Coordinator, at jboyle@asmfc.org.

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PR25-25

Motions

Move to initiate an addendum to respond to the 2025 Stock Assessment Update for two stock regions: NJ/NY Bight and DMV. Additionally, the addendum should also allow for the MARI and LIS regions to modify management for precautionary or alignment purposes.

Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Cimino. Motion passes (5 in favor, 3 opposed).

Move to elect Rich Wong as Vice Chair of the Tautog Management Board.

Motion made by Mr. LaFrance and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

AMERICAN LOBSTER MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Press Release

American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment Finds GOM/GBK Stock Not Depleted but Experiencing Overfishing & SNE Stock Significantly Depleted but Not Experiencing Overfishing

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's American Lobster Management Board received the results of the 2025 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report, which presents

contrasting results for the two American lobster stocks in US waters. The Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) stock is not depleted but has declined 34% since peak levels in 2018, and overfishing is occurring. The Southern New England (SNE) stock remains significantly depleted with record low abundances for all life stages in recent years.

“The Benchmark Stock Assessment is a considerable advancement in our understanding US American lobster resource. It was fully endorsed by an external panel of fishery scientists as the best scientific information available to manage the lobster resource,” stated Board Chair Renee Zobel from New Hampshire. “On behalf of the American Lobster Board, I commend the members of the Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee for their outstanding work on the 2025 Benchmark Stock Assessment Report. This assessment reflects the commitment of the Committee and Peer Review Panel to providing the Board with the highest-caliber science to inform management decisions and improve our understanding of the complex and changing relationship between the environment and lobster resource.”

There are notable differences between the fisheries operating in the GOM and GBK portions of the GOM/GBK stock. The GOM fishery accounts for the vast majority of US lobster landings, averaging 82% of the annual landings since 1982, and is predominately carried out by small vessels making day trips in nearshore waters. The GBK fishery is considerably smaller, averaging 5% of the landings since 1982, and is predominantly carried out by larger vessels making multi-day trips to offshore waters. Total GOM/GBK annual landings increased from a stable period in the 1980s, averaging approximately 35.4 million pounds, through the 1990s and 2000s, exceeding 100 million pounds for the first time in 2009. Landings from 2012 through 2018 stabilized at record levels, averaging 145.7 million pounds. Landings have declined since the last assessment, averaging 123.6 million pounds from 2019-2023.

Historically, the SNE fishery was predominately an inshore fishery. Landings peaked in 1997 at 21.8 million pounds and accounted for 26% of the total US lobster landings. Following the peak, landings from SNE have continuously declined to the lowest on record in 2023 (1.7 million pounds), now accounting for only 1% of the US landings. The fishery has also shifted to a predominantly offshore fishery as inshore abundance declined at a faster rate.

In the GOM/GBK stock, recruitment and spawning stock biomass estimates have declined in recent years from record highs. Recent exploitation is just above the exploitation threshold, indicating overfishing is occurring. Given the overfishing status and rapid declines in abundance in recent years, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee

encouraged the initiation of a management strategy evaluation to establish clear management objectives for all stakeholders, better understand socioeconomic status and concerns, and identify potential management tools that might be supported by the industry and prevent further declines. Although continued adverse environmental indicators suggest environmental conditions are major contributors to the poor abundance status in SNE, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee believes significant management action would provide the best chance of stabilizing or improving the abundance and reproductive capacity of this stock.

The assessment highlights extensive research on the influence of the environment on American lobster life history and population dynamics. Among the critical environmental variables, temperature stands out as the primary influence. The American lobster’s range is experiencing changing environmental conditions at some of the fastest rates in the world, making consideration of environmental factors

essential when assessing the lobster stocks. Therefore, the assessment incorporated environmental data time series including water temperatures at several fixed monitoring stations throughout the lobster's range, average water temperatures over large areas such as those sampled by fishery-independent surveys, oceanographic processes affecting the environment, and other environmental indicators such as lobster prey abundance. These data time series were analyzed for significant shifts in the lobster environment and population that can affect stock productivity and impact recruitment levels and the ability to support different levels of fishing pressure.

Stock abundance is characterized using reference points for abundance and exploitation. Based on these reference points, the GOMGBK stock is not depleted and overfishing is occurring. The average abundance from 2021-2023 was 202 million lobsters, which remains above the abundance limit reference point, but below the fishery/industry target, indicating the stock's ability to replenish itself is not jeopardized, but economic conditions for the lobster fishery may be degrading. The average exploitation from 2021-2023 was just above the exploitation threshold, indicating overfishing is occurring.

The SNE stock is significantly depleted and the stock's ability to replenish itself is diminished. The average abundance from 2021-2023 was 6 million lobster, well below the abundance threshold (18 million lobster) and the lowest on record. The average exploitation from 2021-2023 was between the exploitation threshold and target, indicating overfishing is not occurring.

Stock indicators, which are based strictly on observed data and are free from inherent assumptions in the stock assessment models, were also used as an independent, model-free assessment of the lobster stocks to corroborate the assessment model results. Indicators of adult lobster abundance generally showed similar results to the assessment model for the GOM/GBK stock, with abundance declines from peaks since 2018. GOM/GBK young-of-year (YOY) indicators have shown increases from lows in the 2010s, but remain below higher levels observed in the 2000s. Inshore surveys exhibit stronger abundance declines than offshore surveys, and indicators show higher exploitation rates inshore. New to the 2025 assessment, recruit-dependency indicators show inshore harvest is highly dependent on incoming recruitment (lobsters that enter the fishery due to catchable size). Landings and revenue indicators show declining trends but remain at positive levels. Indicators related to environmental conditions, particularly bottom water temperatures, remain positive in GOM/GBK and shell disease prevalence, although increasing in some areas, remains low relative to SNE.

SNE abundance indicators agree with model results and indicate declines to record low abundances for all life stages in recent years. The contraction of the SNE stock has continued and is now evident offshore as well as inshore. Given data and survey challenges leading to increased instability in the SNE model, consistent poor stock status estimates, and the lack of evidence suggesting environmental and stock conditions will improve in SNE, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee recommended future assessments evaluate the condition of the SNE stock using model-free indicators and prioritize modelling efforts on the GOM/GBK stock.

The Peer Review Panel found the 2025 assessment meets and exceeds the standard for best scientific information available and provides a suitable foundation for management. The Panel commended the addition of socioeconomic data that provide insight into changes in the fishery and the considerable efforts to evaluate environmental impacts on the stock. However, the Panel cautioned against placing

too much emphasis on environmental effects and discounting the effects of fishing on the lobster populations.

The Board accepted the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use. A more detailed overview of the stock assessment, as well as the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report will be available on the Commission website <https://asmfc.org/species/american-lobster/> under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR25-27

Meeting Summary

In addition to approving the 2025 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use, the American Lobster Board discussed follow-up tasks for the Technical Committee (TC) in response to the assessment recommendations, and received updates on the Joint New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Alternative Gear Marking Framework, and from Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts on recent surveys on management perspectives of the Gulf of Maine lobster industry. The Board also considered the annual Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review and elected a Vice Chair.

Considering the findings of the assessment and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) recommendations, the Board tasked the TC with several items to inform potential management responses. First, the Board tasked the TC with creating a combined index for tracking recruit abundance in GOM/GBK as part of future data updates to the Board. It also directed the TC to estimate the benefits to the GOM/GBK fishery that would have resulted from implementing the minimum gauge size increases under Addendum XXVII that were ultimately repealed. The TC will report to the Board on these analyses and review the process for conducting an MSE for the GOM/GBK stock at the Winter Meeting.

The Board received an update on recent actions of the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils regarding the development of the Joint Alternative Gear Marking Framework Adjustment. The purpose of the Framework is to consider changes to surface-marking requirements that would allow the use of fixed gear without a persistent buoy line, such as on-demand trap gear, as a possible approach for reducing entanglement risk for large whales. At their recent meetings, the Councils postponed final action on the Framework until additional information on ropeless gear and visualization technology is available to better inform stakeholder input and Council decision-making. NOAA Fisheries intends to gather information through a Request for Information in 2026 to address this need.

Maine, New Hampshire, and Maine reported out on recent stakeholder surveys conducted to better understand to better understand fishermen's and dealers' perceptions of the fishery and identify potential management approaches for the Gulf of Maine. The survey results show similar views across states within each of the Lobster Conservation and Management Areas (LCMAs), generally positive perceptions of the status of the fishery and resource, and concerns about fishing input costs and possible future restrictions related to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. The GOM states plan to review their survey results with industry members and will provide additional updates to the Board at the next meeting.

The Board also approved the American Lobster and Jonah Crab FMP Reviews for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and the *de minimis* status for Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Based on the Plan Review Team recommendations, the Board tasked the Technical Committee with providing guidance on commercial sampling needs by stock area to support the stock assessment.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to accept the 2025 American lobster benchmark stock assessment and peer review report for management use.

Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to task the Technical Committee to include a recruit index for GOM/GBK, similar to what was used in Addendum XXVII (combined recruit survey index), as a part of future data updates to the Board at the annual meetings.

Motion by Dr. Wilson and seconded by Mr. Borden. Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Move to task the Technical Committee to project the benefits to the GOM/GBK fishery if the gauge increases from Addendum XXVII were put into place as originally scheduled.

Motion made by Mr. Kaelin and seconded by Mr. Hyatt. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 opposed).

Move to approve the American Lobster and Jonah Crab FMP Reviews for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for DE, MD, and VA, and to task the TC with providing recommendations on commercial sampling needs by stock or management area.

Motion made by Mr. Cimino and seconded by Mr. Train. Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Move to elect John Maniscalco as Vice Chair to the American Lobster Board.

Motion made by Mr. Reid and second by Mr. McKiernan. Motion passed by unanimous consent.

HORSESHOE CRAB MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 28, 2025)

Press Release

Horseshoe Crab Board Sets Male-Only Bait Harvest Specifications for Horseshoe Crabs of Delaware Bay-Origin for 2026 and 2027

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission’s Horseshoe Crab Management Board approved bait harvest specifications for horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay-origin. Taking into consideration the output of the Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Framework, the Board set an annual harvest limit of 500,000 male horseshoe crabs and zero female Delaware Bay-origin horseshoe crabs for 2026 and 2027. Addendum IX was approved in May 2025 and allows the Board to set multi-year specifications for male-only harvest.

While the ARM Framework output allowed for a small amount of female harvest, the Board elected to maintain zero female horseshoe crab harvest for the next two fishing years as a conservative measure while it conducts a stakeholder engagement process to evaluate several aspects of the ARM Framework and considers changes to better align the model with stakeholder values. To make up for the lost harvest

of larger female crabs, the Board agreed to increase Maryland and Virginia’s male harvest quotas with an offset ratio of 2:1 males to females. Using the allocation methodology established in Addendum VIII, the following quotas were set for New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia:

	Delaware Bay Origin Horseshoe Crab Quota (no. of crabs)	Total Quota*
State	Male Only	Male Only
Delaware	173,014	173,014
New Jersey	173,014	173,014
Maryland	132,865	255,980
Virginia**	21,107	81,331

*Total harvest quotas for Maryland and Virginia include crabs which are not of Delaware Bay origin.

**Virginia harvest refers to harvest east of the COLREGS line only

Under Addendum IX, the Board can maintain the harvest limit of 500,000 male horseshoe crabs through 2028 based on the 2025 ARM Framework output with no annual action required. The Board will continue to review survey data for red knots and horseshoe crabs each year and can modify the specifications before 2028 if desired.

The Board also reviewed and approved changes to the Advisory Panel membership based on recommendations from the Board Work Group tasked with providing input on the appropriate distribution of advisors by region and user group, including non-traditional stakeholders. For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR25-26

Meeting Summary

In addition to setting Delaware Bay bait harvest specifications for the 2026 and 2027 fishing years, the Board also received planning updates on the ongoing stakeholder engagement process to inform possible changes to the ARM Framework, considered the annual Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review, and approved changes to the advisory panel (AP) membership.

The Board received an update on a process initiated earlier this year to review and revise the Utility, Reward, and Harvest (U/R/H) functions of the ARM Framework with input from stakeholders, based on a key recommendation from the July 2024 workshop on Delaware Bay horseshoe crab management objectives. The U/R/H functions are mathematical functions within the ARM model that reflect stakeholder priorities. The Commission has contracted with a third-party facilitator, Compass Resource Management, to design and conduct a stakeholder engagement process to elicit stakeholder values and perspectives to develop clear, actionable recommendations for revising the U/R/H functions, ensuring these functions transparently reflect the importance of horseshoe crabs to commercial harvesters, human health, and the ecosystem. The process will convene participants from bait fisheries, biomedical groups, dealers, ecosystem, shorebird, and horseshoe crab conservation groups, and state and federal resource managers for a series of educational meetings and an in-person workshop, which will be scheduled over the next several months. The input gathered through this process will inform recommendations on changes to the U/R/H functions to be considered by the Board.

At the Spring 2025 meeting, the Board agreed to solicit nominations for non-traditional stakeholder seats and formed a Work Group to review the AP membership and develop recommendations for Board consideration, addressing a consensus recommendation from the July 2024 stakeholder workshop to determine if the Horseshoe Crab AP has adequate representation across stakeholder groups. The Work Group recommended changes to the AP membership to balance the relative interests of each region. Considering these recommendations the Board approved the addition of seven non-traditional stakeholder seats representing horseshoe crab and shorebird conservation interests, and three commercial harvesters to the AP.

The Board also approved the horseshoe crab FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions

Main Motion

Move to establish male-only harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 based on the ARM Framework with 500,000 males and no female harvest of Delaware Bay-origin crabs. In addition, the 2:1 offset will be added to MD's and VA's allocations due to no female harvest.

Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. Borden.

Motion to Amend

Move to amend to add 2028.

Motion made by Mr. Gates and seconded by Mr. McKiernan. Motion fails (4 in favor, 10 opposed).

Move to establish male-only harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 based on the ARM Framework with 500,000 males and no female harvest of Delaware Bay-origin crabs. In addition, the 2:1 offset will be added to MD's and VA's allocations due to no female harvest.

Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the FMP Review and state compliance reports for the 2024 fishing year, and *de minimis* status for SC, GA, and FL.

Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Mr. Grist. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the changes to the Advisory Panel membership as recommended in the Work Group memo dated October 10, 2025.

Motion made by Ms. Kennedy and seconded by Ms. Costa. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

AMERICAN EEL MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 28, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The American Eel Management Board approved the annual Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review and considered a proposal from Florida to discontinue the young of year (YOY) survey.

The Board approved the American Eel FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and the *de minimis* status for Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, and Georgia for yellow eel. Preliminary landings for yellow eel in 2024 decreased from 2023 and are at the second lowest level in the time series. The Plan Review Team noted no concerns about state implementation of the FMP and recommended the Commission work with the US Fish and Wildlife service to compare landings and export data for American eel.

Florida presented a proposal to discontinue the annual YOY survey on the Guana River. Funding for continuing this sampling is limited, there have been extremely low catches in recent years at the current sampling site, and there are no viable alternative sampling sites. FWC is proposing to use the limited available funding for other research and monitoring activities that would better support American eel management and conservation. The Board tasked the TC to evaluate the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel survey for use in management and assessment of the American eel stock. The TC will report its findings at the next Board meeting so it can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to approve American Eel FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, and Georgia for yellow eel.

Motion made by Ms. Corbett and seconded by Mr. Train. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to direct the American Eel Technical Committee to evaluate the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel survey and its contribution to the Commission's management and assessment of the American eel stock, and report back to the Commission at the next American Eel Management Board meeting so the Board can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.

Motion made by Ms. Burgess and seconded by Mr. Haymans. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

COMMISSION BUSINESS SESSION (OCTOBER 28, 2025)

Press Release

Daniel McKiernan Elected ASMFC Chair

Dewey Beach, DE – Today, member states of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) thanked Joseph Cimino of New Jersey for a successful two-year term as Chair and elected Daniel McKiernan of Massachusetts to succeed him.

"I'm honored to be chosen by my fellow Commissioners to lead our efforts for the next two years. One of my priorities will be to work with my colleagues in the states and federal agencies to seek resources to fund fundamental fisheries data collection and science activities to support our management programs. Other key topics over the next two years will be our ability to adapt to changes in species distribution and availability and how best to respond to the recalibration of recreational fishing effort and

harvest data from the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey,” said Mr. McKiernan. Mr. McKiernan continued, “I want to thank outgoing Chair, Joe Cimino for his leadership in tackling some challenging management issues for species such as American lobster, American eel, Atlantic striped bass, Atlantic menhaden, horseshoe crab, and red drum. He helped support the advancement of fisheries science through the completion of an impressive number of benchmark stock assessments and assessment updates for river herring, red drum, American lobster, horseshoe crab, tautog, Atlantic sturgeon, and Atlantic menhaden (single species assessment update and ecological reference points benchmark assessment). Further, under his leadership, the Commission also strengthened stakeholder engagement in horseshoe crab management by bringing together diverse stakeholders for a Delaware Bay management objectives workshop to provide recommendations for possible revisions to the management process, and by increasing nontraditional stakeholder representation on the Horseshoe Crab Advisory Panel to more equitably balance user group perspectives. Lastly, Mr. Cimino initiated the process to consider possible changes to voting practices and declared interests on species management boards.”



Additionally, advances in habitat conservation were made by the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) through its funding of five on-the-ground projects, which will open over seven river miles and restore over 110 acres of habitat. These include dam removal projects in New Jersey and Massachusetts, as well as saltmarsh and oyster restoration projects in Maryland and Florida. ACFHP will also be hosting a Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Workshop in 2026 focused on developing a Seed Transfer Best Management Practices Guidance Document.

From a data collection and management perspective, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) also made progress under Mr. Cimino’s leadership. ACCSP supported 20 partner agency data collection projects and expanded the scope and security of the ACCSP Data Warehouse. ACCSP held a data accountability workshop and extended data validation tools within electronic reporting systems; extended implementation of harvester One Stop Reporting; and made progress on a methodology to more fully use for-hire logbooks in Marine Recreational Information Program’s catch statistics.

Mr. McKiernan has directed the Massachusetts Division of Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) since late 2019, where he develops agency policies, represents the Commonwealth in interstate and federal fishery management forums and administers nearly all aspects of the DMF’s in-state management and regulations for fisheries management. He began his professional career as a field biologist for DMF in 1985 and worked closely with the lobster fishery as a sea sampler and an assistant marine biologist. He brought his field experience to DMF’s headquarters and has worked on fisheries management and policy for almost four decades. He has worked diligently to achieve co-existence between endangered right whales and the maritime and fishing industries in Massachusetts. In 2023, Massachusetts was recognized with the NOAA Fisheries “Partner in the Spotlight” award for exceptional efforts to the conservation and recovery of Northern Right Whales.

Mr. McKiernan is practiced in the arenas of federal and interstate fisheries management. As a long-standing representative to the Commission, he has chaired numerous species management boards and was recognized for his management efforts with the Commission's Award of Excellence in 2018. He is a strong promoter of conservation and accountable fisheries management for commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, and the seafood industry at large. Mr. McKiernan is a graduate of UMASS-Dartmouth and earned an MS in Fisheries Biology from Auburn University. He received the Massachusetts Pride in Performance Award, as well as the Massachusetts Lobsterman's Association "Ralph W. Maling" Award of Excellence for dedicated service on behalf of the Commonwealth's lobster industry.

The Commission also elected Doug Haymans, Director of the Georgia Coastal Resources Division as its new Vice-Chair. PR25-24

Meeting Summary

The Commission held its Business Session to review and consider approval of the 2026 Action Plan and elect a new Commission Chair and Vice-Chair. The Commission approved the 2026 Action Plan, which guides the Commission's activities over the next year as they pertain to management, science, data collection, law enforcement, habitat conservation, outreach, and finance and administration.

The Commission unanimously appointed Dan McKiernan (Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries) as Chair and Doug Haymans (Georgia Coastal Resources Division) as Vice-Chair (see above press release). For more information, please contact Robert Beal, Executive Director, at rbeal@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to approve the ASMFC 2026 Action Plan as modified today.

Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Rhodes. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

On behalf on the Nominating Committee, move to elect Dan McKiernan as ASMFC Chair.

Motion made by Mr. Borden. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

On behalf on the nominating committee, move to elect Doug Haymans as ASMFC Vice Chair

Motion made by Mr. Borden. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 28 & 29, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) conducted a hybrid meeting during the 83rd Annual Meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in Dewey Beach, DE. The Committee discussed the following topics.

Species Discussion

Atlantic Striped Bass – The LEC convened on October 10, 2025, to consider the Striped Bass Management Board's request regarding the Plan Review Teams (PRT) report on the Atlantic Striped Bass Commercial Tagging Ten-Year Review. The committee focused on evaluating the report and discussing additional LEC recommendations pertaining to tagging procedures and potential enhancements to state tagging programs. A summary of the meeting was presented by an LEC member to the Striped Bass Management Board during Annual Meeting Week.

Staff presented an update regarding the draft Addendum III of the Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan. A review was conducted of the LEC recommendations on Addendum III as documented in the LEC meeting summary dated March 27, 2025. The LEC did not offer any additional comments.

Red Drum – Staff presented the LEC with an update regarding the progress of draft Addendum II to the Red Drum Fishery Management Plan. There were no LEC concerns on the proposed addendum.

Other Business

NOAA JEA Funding Update – The Chair provided an update to the committee regarding ASMFC support considering the absence of JEA program funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 Presidential budget. He reported receiving favorable feedback during congressional meetings and noted that NOAA OLE responded positively to our inquiry concerning this matter. The states remain committed to the JEA program and hope to see this funding restored.

Sector Separation – Staff consulted with the LEC regarding Sector Separation. The LEC received an update on recent discussions between the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Representatives from the MAFMC Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) and ASMFC Plan Development Team (PDT) held an initial meeting with the LEC to address key issues identified during early discussions. During this session, FMAT and PDT members solicited input from the LEC members concerning the enforceability and anticipated compliance outcomes for the draft alternatives under review. LEC members actively participated, providing feedback on specific inquiries related to proposed management measures shared with the committee. LEC will continue to monitor these proposals as they progress, offering further insight as appropriate.

NACLEC Training Opportunities – The staff shared the upcoming training schedule for the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs academies covering calendar years 2025 to 2027. Both the Leadership Academy and the Introduction to Conservation Leadership Academy have grown in popularity within the conservation law enforcement community.

USCG NRFTC Training Opportunity - Members of the United States Coast Guard highlighted training opportunity for partnered agencies at the Northeast Regional Fisheries Training Center. The 2026 calendar year class schedule was shared by a USCG representative with members of the LEC.

A closed session was convened during our meeting to facilitate open discussion regarding new and emerging issues in law enforcement. Each agency was given an opportunity to highlight its work and share updates on ongoing enforcement initiatives. For more information, please contact Kurt Blanchard, Law Enforcement Coordinator, at kurt.blanchard@verizon.net.

Motions

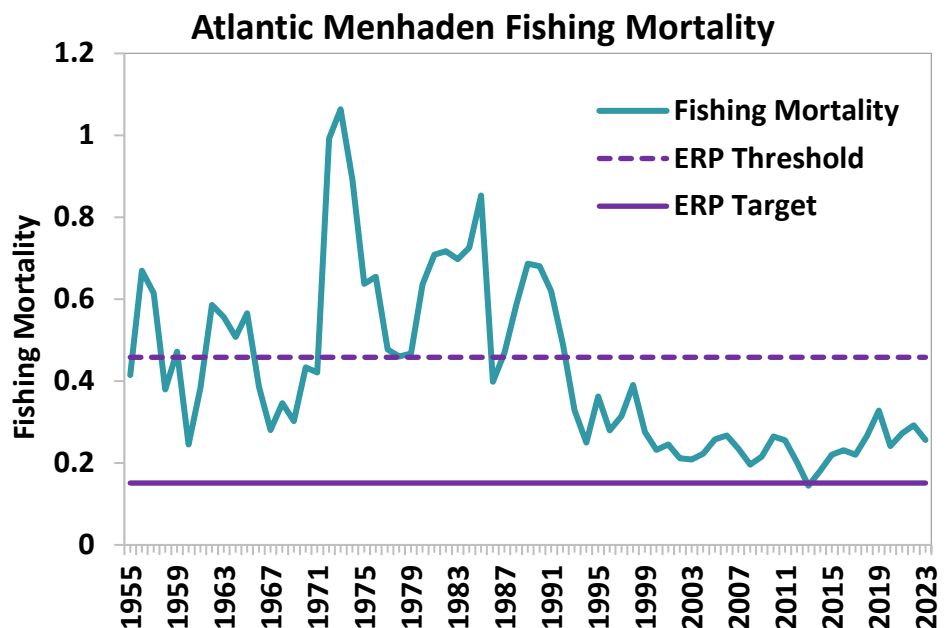
No motions made.

Press Release

**ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Board Reduces 2026 TAC by 20%
and Initiates Addendum for Chesapeake Bay Cap**

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission’s Atlantic Menhaden Management Board received the results of the single-species assessment update and the 2025 Ecological Reference Points (ERPs) Assessment and Peer Review Reports and accepted the ERPs Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use. The goal of the ERPs is to maximize Atlantic menhaden fishing mortality while also accounting for the forage demands of Atlantic striped bass. Atlantic striped bass was the focal species for the reference points because it was the most sensitive predator fish species to Atlantic menhaden harvest in the NWACS-MICE model, so an ERP target and threshold that would provide adequate forage for striped bass would likely not cause declines for other predators in the model. The single-species assessment indicates the stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing relative to the ERPs developed through the benchmark assessment.

However, fishing mortality (F) was above the ERP F target and fecundity (a measure of the number of eggs the stock can produce in a year) was below the ERP fecundity target. Therefore, the Board set the 2026 total allowable catch (TAC) at 186,840 mt, a 20% decrease from the 2023-2025 TAC of 233,550 mt. Projections indicated this TAC would have a 0% chance of overfishing in 2026 but would still result in a 100% probability of fishing mortality being above the ERP F target. To have a lower probability of being at or above the ERP F target, a 50% or more reduction in the TAC would be required. The Board expressed concerns about the socioeconomic impact of implementing such a significant cut in a single year and chose to take a more moderate cut for 2026 only. This change will provide the Board time to conduct outreach on the results of this new assessment and receive more input from stakeholders before considering a TAC for 2027, 2028 and potentially 2029 at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

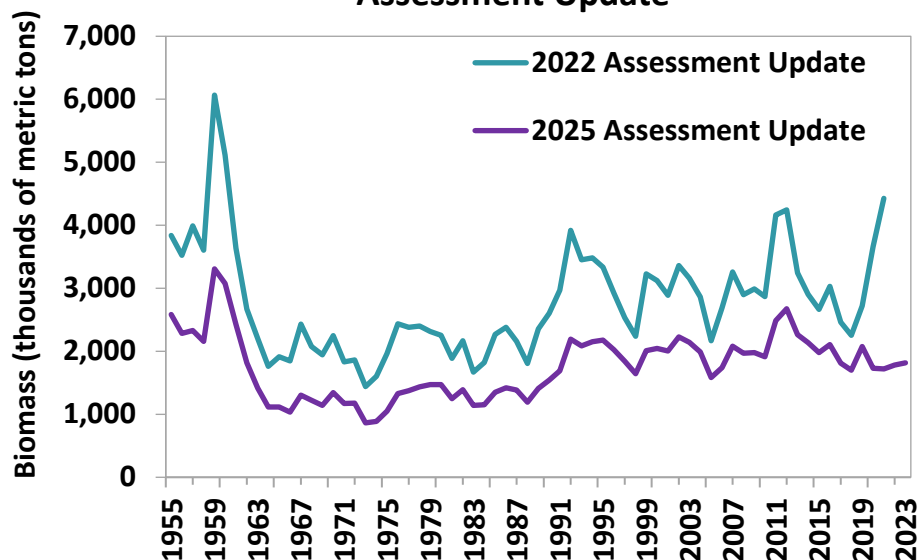


The need for reduction to achieve the ERP F target is due primarily to the change in the estimate of natural mortality used in the single-species stock assessment update, and secondarily to the lower values for the ERPs as a result of the updated and refined ERP model from the benchmark. The 2025 single-species assessment used a revised value of natural mortality that was lower than the value used in the 2020 benchmark and 2022 update. Natural mortality is the rate at which fish die from causes other than fishing; for menhaden, this includes things like predation, disease, and die-offs caused by low oxygen and warm

water. This change was reviewed as part of the 2025 ERP Benchmark Assessment, and the Peer Review Panel agreed it represented the best available scientific information on natural mortality for Atlantic menhaden. Using a lower value of natural mortality in the stock assessment results in a lower overall estimate of population size. When a high estimate of natural mortality is used, the model estimates the population needs to be very large to produce the catches and the trends in observed indices. But, if natural mortality is lower, it means fewer fish are dying due to natural causes, meaning the stock does not need to be as large to produce the observed data.

This lower overall estimate of menhaden abundance was also used in the ecosystem models to establish the ERPs. This change, combined with updating estimates of predator (striped bass, bluefish, weakfish, and spiny dogfish) population sizes and diet data as well as refining the ecosystem model structure resulted in lower estimates of the ERP *F* target and threshold. The ERP assessment, which was endorsed by an independent panel of fisheries scientists, used the Northwest Atlantic Coastal Shelf Model of Intermediate Complexity for Ecosystems (NWACS-MICE) to develop Atlantic menhaden ERPs. The model was chosen because of its ability to explore both the impacts of predators on menhaden biomass and the effects of menhaden harvest on predator populations.

Age-1+ Biomass Estimates from the 2022 and the 2025 Atlantic Menhaden Single-species Assessment Update



The Board also initiated an addendum to Amendment 3 to consider options to reduce the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Cap by up to 50% and distribute the cap more evenly throughout the fishing season. The options will aim to alleviate a concentration of effort that may be affecting other fisheries within the Bay and other potential ecological impacts. The Board discussed concerns regarding decreasing pound net harvests and catch per unit effort within the Bay as the timing of reduction fishing effort has changed the last few years. Amendment 3 currently caps reduction harvest within the Bay at 51,000 mt per year. The Board will review the Draft Addendum in February to consider the draft for public comment or provide additional guidance to the Plan Development Team for further development.

The Assessment Update, the Benchmark ERP Stock Assessment, Peer Review Report, and an overview of will be available on the Atlantic Menhaden webpage at <https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-menhaden/> under News and Resources. For more information, please contact James Boyle, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at jboyle@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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Meeting Summary

In addition to reviewing the 2025 single-species and ERP stock assessments, setting the specifications for the 2026 fishing year, and considering the PDT direction regarding Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board met to consider approval of the Fishery Management Plan Review and state compliance reports for the 2024 fishing year, commercial quota reallocation, and providing direction to the TC to evaluate changing coastwide environmental conditions. Although, due to time constraints, the Board decided to consider approval of the FMP Review via email.

According to [Amendment 3](#), commercial quota allocations will be revisited at least every three years, where the Board can opt to maintain the current allocations or initiate management action, and the current allocations were approved in October 2022. The Board elected to maintain the current allocations but to revisit the discussion at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

Finally, the Board provided two tasks to the Technical Committee to evaluate the effects of changing environmental conditions on the Atlantic menhaden stock:

1. Relative to Research Recommendation 1, task the TC to evaluate information available from NOAA's Ecosystem Dynamics and Assessment Branch and Chesapeake Bay Office, and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, to evaluate the possible effect of cold water on the Continental Shelf on menhaden migration and migratory patterns, particularly in relation to the timing of osprey arrival, nesting, and breeding.
2. Task the TC to consider what role water temperature, dissolved oxygen levels, shoreline hardening, and other environmental factors play in the local abundance of menhaden and other forage species in the Chesapeake Bay.

For more information, please contact James Boyle, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at jboyle@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to accept the 2025 Ecological Reference Points Benchmark Stock Assessment and peer review reports for management use.

Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Main Motion

Move to set the TAC for 2026 through 2028 at 108,450mt to maintain a 50 percent probability of not exceeding the ERP F Target.

Motion made by Mr. Gates and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion substituted.

Motion to Substitute

Move to substitute to set the annual Atlantic Menhaden coastwide TAC for 2026-2028 at 186,840 mt per year (representing a 20% reduction relative to the 2023-2025 TAC).

Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion passes (12 in favor, 6 opposed).

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to set the annual Atlantic Menhaden coastwide TAC for 2026-2028 at 186,840 mt per year (representing a 20% reduction relative to the 2023-2025 TAC).

Motion to Substitute

Move to substitute to set three-year specifications for Atlantic menhaden with the following TACs: 2026 = 186,840 MT; 2027 = 152,700 MT; and 2028 = 124,800 MT.

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Ms. Costa. Motion fails (7 in favor, 11 opposed).

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to set the annual Atlantic Menhaden coastwide TAC for 2026-2028 at 186,840 mt per year (representing a 20% reduction relative to the 2023-2025 TAC).

Motion to Substitute

Move to substitute to set the TAC for 2026 at 186,840 mt (20% reduction from status quo), and re-visit the 2027 TAC and 2028 TAC at the 2026 Annual Meeting

Motion made by Ms. Costa and seconded by Ms. Peake. Motion passes (16 in favor, 2 opposed)

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to set the TAC for 2026 at 186,840 mt (20% reduction from status quo), and re-visit the 2027 TAC and 2028 TAC at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

Motion passes (16 in favor, 2 opposed).

Main Motion

Move to initiate Addendum II to the Atlantic menhaden FMP to address Chesapeake Bay Management concerns. The addendum shall develop periods for the Chesapeake Bay Cap that distributes fishing effort more evenly throughout the season and a range of options to reduce the Bay Cap from status quo up to 50%.

Motion made by Ms. Fegley and seconded by Mr. LaFrance.

Move to amend to add after 50% “and set the bay cap as a percentage of the TAC or allow the bay cap to be set by specification”

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Mr. Borden. Motion passes (13 in favor, 2 opposed, 2 abstentions, 1 null).

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 29, 2025)***Meeting Summary***

The Executive Committee met to discuss several issues, including the FY25 Audit, the Discussion Paper on Declared Interests and Voting Privileges, “Notifying” Actions on Agendas, a Legislative update, and a future annual meeting locations update. The following action items resulted from the Committee’s discussions:

- The Executive Committee reviewed and accepted the FY25 financial audit of the Commission, noting it was a clean audit and no negative findings were reported.
- Mr. Beal reported a *Declared Interests and Voting Privileges* work group was formed to flesh out the discussion paper presented in August, to further frame the Executive committee discussion. The committee will report back to the Executive Committee in February.

- Mr. Beal discussed the issue of “notifying actions” on meeting agendas. After a thorough discussion staff was tasked with developing language for agendas (and possibly the ISFMP Charter), detailing the process and noting when public input was available.
- Mr. Law presented an update on the status of FY26 federal funding, the government shutdown, and the status of two recently introduced bills; the Fisheries Data Modernization Act, and the QUAHOGS Act.
- Mrs. Leach provided an update on future Annual Meeting locations. In 2026 Rhode Island will host the annual meeting; 2027 South Carolina; 2028 Massachusetts; 2029 Pennsylvania, 2030 Georgia and 2031 Connecticut.

For more information, please contact Laura Leach, Director of Finance and Administration, at lleach@asmfc.org

Motions

Move to accept the FY25 Audit as presented.

Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passed unanimously.

HABITAT COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 29, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The ASMFC Habitat Committee met to review ongoing projects, discuss emerging habitat issues, and provide state updates on recent and planned habitat restoration, protection, and management activities. The Committee received updates on the Habitat Management Series, including progress toward finalizing the Atlantic States Shell Recycling Report, which compiles data and best practices from existing shell recycling programs along the Atlantic coast. Members also discussed the next installment of the Habitat Hotline Atlantic (2025 issue), which will continue to feature state and regional habitat highlights. The Committee considered future development of a centralized ArcGIS-based mapping tool to support updates to Fish Habitats of Concern (FHOC).

Committee members further discussed the development of a long-term work plan to identify and prioritize key Atlantic coastal habitat issues, synthesize shared state-level priorities, and communicate findings and recommendations to the ISFMP Policy Board for future direction.

Highlights from roundtable state updates included:

- **Connecticut:** Establishment of a new National Estuarine Research Reserve with a focus on SAV conservation and monitoring.
- **New Hampshire:** Expansion of rotational oyster reef closures with strong community support.
- **Delaware:** Completion of a major Brandywine Creek dam removal project improving shad passage.
- **Massachusetts:** Continued investment in eelgrass restoration, shellfish reef enhancement, and coastal biodiversity research.
- **New Jersey:** Expansion of oyster shell recycling partnerships with regional distributors and restaurants.

- **North Carolina:** Progress on the next phase of the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan emphasizing SAV and wetland restoration.
- **Maine:** Ongoing fish passage restoration projects projected to reopen over 800 miles of riverine habitat.
- **Florida:** Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program funding to restore more than 200 acres of fish habitat across seven habitat types.

Next steps:

The Committee will finalize the Atlantic States Shell Recycling Report, determine the focus of the next Habitat Management Series publication, and continue discussions on regional habitat mapping and data integration to support ASMFC management priorities.

For more information, please contact Simen Kaalstad, Habitat Committee Coordinator, at skaalstad@asmfc.org.

ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 29, 2025)

Press Release

ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Board Approves Addendum III Without Reductions in Fishery Removals *New Work Group Planned to Address Long-Term Management and Stock Concerns*

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission’s Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Addendum modifies requirements for commercial tagging programs, implements a standard method of measuring total length for size limit regulations, and allows Maryland to change its Chesapeake Bay recreational season baseline if the state so chooses.

The Board decided not to move forward with the proposed 12% reduction in fishery removals after lengthy deliberation. The Board reviewed the preliminary estimates of 2025 recreational catch through June, which were lower than anticipated and suggested that the projections may have underestimated the probability of rebuilding by 2029 and overestimated the reductions necessary to rebuild. The Board noted that the over 4,000 public comments they received on the draft addendum were sharply divided on the issue, as was the Board itself. Ultimately, the Board maintained current recreational measures and commercial quotas, noting the severe economic consequences of the proposed reduction, the low fishing mortality rate in 2024, and preliminary indications of lower catch in 2025. However, the Board continued to express concern about the seven consecutive years of low recruitment in Chesapeake Bay and the impact on the stock as those weak year-classes become the majority of the spawning stock biomass after 2029. To address this, the Board approved the establishment of a Work Group to consider these upcoming stock and management challenges beyond 2029. The Board will further discuss the specific tasks and timing of this Work Group at subsequent Board meetings.

For commercial tagging, the Addendum requires states to tag commercially harvested fish by the first point of landing. Previously, states could choose the point of tagging, including tagging at the point of sale. This change to when tagging occurs addresses concerns that waiting to tag fish until the point of

sale could increase the risk of illegal harvest. The three states that will need to switch their tagging program from point of sale to point of landing have until the end of 2028 to make that change due to the extensive administrative and programmatic transition needed.

For measuring total length, the Addendum specifies that when measuring total length of a striped bass it must be a straight-line measurement with upper and lower fork of the tail squeezed together. This

definition applies to both sectors. This new definition addresses concerns that the previous lack of a standard definition was potentially undermining the intended conservation, consistency, and enforceability of the coastwide size limits, especially for narrow slot limits. States that do not have the new definition in place already have until January 1, 2027 to make changes to their state regulations.

For Maryland's Chesapeake Bay recreational fishery, the Board approved Maryland's ability to change its recreational season baseline (i.e., the timing, type, and duration of striped bass closures throughout the year) if the state so chooses. Maryland is considering changing its season baseline to simplify its Chesapeake Bay regulations as well as re-align access based on stakeholder input and release mortality rates. The new baseline is estimated to be net neutral calculated to maintain the same level of removals as compared to 2024. Maryland will notify the Board of its decision by December 31, 2025 in its state implementation plan.

Addendum III will be available in November on the Commission website at <https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-striped-bass/> under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR25-30

Meeting Summary

In addition to selecting measures for and approving Addendum III, the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board received a report from the Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) on commercial tagging.

The LEC was tasked with reviewing the Plan Review Team's Commercial Tagging Ten-Year Review Report and discussing any further LEC recommendations on point of tagging and potential improvements to state tagging programs. The LEC discussed that the current state programs are effective and each in their own way offer a level of protection to the resource and meet the spirit of the FMP. On point of tagging, the LEC noted that management measures in the ocean fishery creating different size and possession limits between sectors gives law enforcement the ability to clearly define a commercial take from a recreational take, which reduces the enforcement concern in a point-of-sale program. Point of sale or point of landing tagging is less desirable for enforcement in states that are managed through individual quotas, and/or that allow for multiple commercial limits on board a vessel, or that have overlapping size limits between the commercial and recreational fishery. In these instances, states should strongly consider point of harvest tagging. If a point of landing provision were to be considered more widely, law enforcement would recommend that a clear and consistent definition of landing be used. On tag distribution, the LEC does not have any major concerns with how states are managing their respective tag distribution. On tag accountability, the LEC noted all jurisdictions have a process in place to account for the lost, damaged, or delinquent tags. For potential improvements to state tagging programs, the LEC noted the importance of being able to trace a tag back to the harvester.

For more information contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

Motions

Main Motion

Move to approve in Section 3.4 Option A Status Quo

Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Mr. Clark.

Motion to Amend

Move to amend to add “and establish a Work Group to develop a white paper that could inform a future management document. The Work Group should include representation from all sectors in addition to scientists and managers. The goal of this Work Group is to consider how to update the FMP’s goals, objectives, and management of striped bass beyond 2029, in consideration of severely reduced reproductive success in the Chesapeake Bay. The Work Group should utilize public comment, including that received during the Addendum III process to inform its research and management recommendations and work with the Benchmark SAS to incorporate ideas and deliver necessary data products. Work Group discussions should include the following topics:

- **Review BRPs and consider recruitment-sensitive, model-based approaches.**
- **Formally review hatchery stocking as both a research tool and a management tool for striped bass w/ cost analysis.**
- **Evaluate the potential for other river systems to contribute to the coastal stock.**
- **Explore drivers of recruitment success/failure in Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, and the Hudson in light of changing climatic and environmental conditions, including potential impacts from invasive species.**
- **Explore the reproductive contribution of large and small female fish and the implications of various size-based management tools.**
- **Methods to address the discard mortality in the catch and release fishery."**

Motion made by Mr. Gary and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion passes (14 in favor, 2 opposed).

Main Motion as Amended

Move to approve in Section 3.4 Option A Status Quo and establish a Work Group to develop a white paper that could inform a future management document. The Work Group should include representation from all sectors in addition to scientists and managers. The goal of this Work Group is to consider how to update the FMP’s goals, objectives, and management of striped bass beyond 2029, in consideration of severely reduced reproductive success in the Chesapeake Bay. The Work Group should utilize public comment, including that received during the Addendum III process to inform its research and management recommendations and work with the Benchmark SAS to incorporate ideas and deliver necessary data products. Work Group discussions should include the following topics:

- **Review BRPs and consider recruitment-sensitive, model-based approaches.**
- **Formally review hatchery stocking as both a research tool and a management tool for striped bass w/ cost analysis.**
- **Evaluate the potential for other river systems to contribute to the coastal stock.**
- **Explore drivers of recruitment success/failure in Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, and the Hudson in light of changing climatic and environmental conditions, including potential impacts from invasive species.**

- Explore the reproductive contribution of large and small female fish and the implications of various size-based management tools.
- Methods to address the discard mortality in the catch and release fishery."

Motion to Amend

Move to amend to replace "Option A Status Quo" with "Option B (equal 12% reduction by sector)"

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion fails (5 in favor, 11 opposed).

Main Motion as Amended

Move to approve in Section 3.4 Option A Status Quo and establish a Work Group to develop a white paper that could inform a future management document. The Work Group should include representation from all sectors in addition to scientists and managers. The goal of this Work Group is to consider how to update the FMP's goals, objectives, and management of striped bass beyond 2029, in consideration of severely reduced reproductive success in the Chesapeake Bay. The Work Group should utilize public comment, including that received during the Addendum III process to inform its research and management recommendations and work with the Benchmark SAS to incorporate ideas and deliver necessary data products. Work Group discussions should include the following topics:

- Review BRPs and consider recruitment-sensitive, model-based approaches.
- Formally review hatchery stocking as both a research tool and a management tool for striped bass w/ cost analysis.
- Evaluate the potential for other river systems to contribute to the coastal stock.
- Explore drivers of recruitment success/failure in Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, and the Hudson in light of changing climatic and environmental conditions, including potential impacts from invasive species.
- Explore the reproductive contribution of large and small female fish and the implications of various size-based management tools.
- Methods to address the discard mortality in the catch and release fishery.

Motion passes (13 in favor, 3 opposed).

Move to add a task to explore the socioeconomic impacts on the striped bass commercial fishing sector, including the party/charter sector, from potential quota reductions not consistent with actual striped bass mortality effects from that sector.

Motion made by Mr. Kaelin and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion fails (1 in favor, 13 opposed, 2 abstentions).

Main Motion

Move to approve in Section 3.3 Maryland's ability to choose Option A, status quo, or Option B, a new Maryland baseline season. Maryland would notify the Board of the option chosen through its implementation plan.

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark.

Motion to Amend

Move to amend to replace Option B (a new Maryland baseline season) with Option C (new baseline season with 10% buffer)

Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion fails (6 in favor, 8 opposed, 2 abstentions).

Move to approve in Section 3.3 Maryland's ability to choose Option A, status quo, or Option B, a new Maryland baseline season. Maryland would notify the Board of the option chosen through its implementation plan.

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes (7 in favor, 6 opposed, 2 abstentions, 1 null).

Main Motion

Move to approve in Section 3.2 Option A. Status Quo States Choose Point of Harvest or Point of Sale Tagging.

Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Batsavage.

Motion to Substitute for Option C: Commercial Tagging by the First Point of Landing with a three-year transition period.

Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion passes (8 in favor, 4 opposed, 4 abstentions).

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to approve in Section 3.2 Option C: Commercial Tagging by the First Point of Landing with a three-year transition period.

Motion passes (10 in favor, 3 opposed, 3 abstentions).

Move to adopt in Section 3.1 Option B, Mandatory Elements for Total Length Definition with the following requirements: squeezing the tail and a straight-line measurement. This definition applies to both the recreational and commercial sectors.

Motion made by Mr. Batsavage and seconded by Mr. Gary. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the following compliance schedule for the Maryland recreational season baseline and total length definition:

- **States must submit implementation plans by December 31, 2025.**
- **States must implement regulations for the total length definition by January 1, 2027.**

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the following compliance schedule for commercial tagging:

- **States must submit implementation plans January 1, 2028.**
- **States must implement regulations by December 31, 2028.**

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes by consent with one objection by Rhode Island.

Move to approve Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Atlantic Striped Bass FMP, as amended today.

Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Gary. Motion passes (13 in favor, 1 opposed, 1 null).

Press Release

ASMFC Sciaenids Management Board Approves Red Drum Addendum II

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission’s Sciaenids Management Board approved Addendum II to Amendment 2 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Red Drum. The Addendum updates red drum management, with the goal of improving efficiency, flexibility, and timeliness in implementation of new regulations and providing assessment advice. In addition, the Addendum modifies the fishing mortality for the southern stock (South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida) to end

overfishing and aligns red drum recreational regulations in Virginia, Maryland, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) given their shared water bodies.

The Addendum establishes a process whereby states can propose management measures in response to new assessment advice, including assessment analyses outside of the Commission’s stock assessment process. It also allows the Board to approve new methods to estimate the impact of different management options on fishing mortality.

In addition, the Addendum modifies the fishing mortality (30% spawning potential ratio or $F_{30\%}$) for the southern stock will aim to meet with implemented management measures. At a minimum, states will reduce fishing effort to $F_{30\%}$ to end overfishing with the unchanged long-term goal of reducing effort to achieve the fishing mortality associated with 40% spawning potential ratio. South Carolina and Georgia will submit proposals by April 1, 2026 with regulatory options that, at minimum, achieve the 14.4% reduction associated with $F_{30\%}$. Florida implemented more restrictive red drum regulations in September 2022; these measures are estimated to have achieved the minimum reduction. The Board will review South Carolina and Georgia’s proposals at its May 2026 meeting.

Northern stock states (New Jersey through North Carolina) are not able to estimate fishing mortality at this time. The states of New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, and North Carolina will maintain their current fishing regulations. For Virginia, Maryland and the PRFC, the Board agreed to the following recreational measures: 3 fish bag limit and 18”-26” inch total length slot. These measures, which are currently in place for Virginia, are meant to simplify management and enforcement in the shared waterbodies of the three jurisdictions. Although these measures will raise Maryland’s current red drum bag limit from 1 fish to 3 fish, the Board noted that these new regulations will lower the 5-fish bag limit for red drum in the Potomac River to 3 fish, providing some additional protection to red drum within the 18”-26” total length slot.

The implementation date for all new measures is September 1, 2026.

Lastly, the Addendum updates *de minimis* provisions. A state may be granted *de minimis* status if the Board determines that action by the state would contribute insignificantly to the overall management program for a specific species. The Addendum updates the definition so that a state may be considered *de minimis* if the average total landings for the last three years is less than 1% of total landings from its respective stock. In addition, the Addendum implements a process for

establishing a set of measures for *de minimis* states which will provide a minimum level of protection and prevent regulatory loopholes.

Addendum II will be available in November on the Commission website at <https://asmfc.org/species/red-drum/> under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org or 703.842.0723.

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PR25-29

Motions

Move to adopt Option B Establish Process to Adjust Management Measures for Section 3.1.

Motion made by Mr. Dyar and seconded by Mr. Woodward. Motion carries without objection.

Move to adopt Option B Establish Process to Adjust State Management Measures, Allowing for Alternative Methods to Estimate Fishing Mortality for Section 3.2.

Motion made by Mr. Woodward and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion passes (6 in favor, 2 opposed, 1 abstention).

Move to separate Issue 3.3 in Addendum II for the northern region stock and the southern region stock so that the decision is independent for each stock's preferred management program.

Motion made by Mr. Dyar and seconded by Mr. Woodward. Motion passes with one objection from NC.

Move to adopt Option B for the Southern Stock for Section 3.3.

Motion made by Ms. Burgess and seconded by Mr. Woodward. Motion passes (4 in favor, 2 opposed, 3 abstentions).

Motion to adopt Option B, of Section 3.4 of the Red Drum Draft Addendum II, setting the Virginia, Maryland, and PRFC recreational measures for red drum as a 18"-26" slot with a 3 fish per person possession limit.

Motion made by Mr. Sikorski and seconded by Mr. Owens. Motion passes (3 in favor, 1 opposed, 5 abstentions).

Move to adopt Option B Update *De Minimis* Provisions for Section 3.5.

Motion by Mr. Woodward, second by Mr. Bell. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to set the following implementation schedule for Section 3.3 and 3.4:

- States to submit proposals by April 1, 2026.
- The Board will review and consider approval of proposals at the Spring 2026 Commission meeting.
- States to implement regulations by September 1, 2026.

Motion made by Mr. Dyar and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion passes by consent.

Move to approve Addendum II as modified today.

Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion passed with one objection from NC.

INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM POLICY BOARD (OCTOBER 30, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The ISFMP Policy Board met to review reports from the Executive Committee, the Assessment Science Committee (ASC), the Law Enforcement Committee (LEC), the Habitat Committee, and the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) (see relevant committee reports earlier in this document); consider 2026 coastal shark specifications; receive and update on the status of the Pamlico Sound trawl survey, and receive updates on the Atlantic migratory group cobia and Atlantic sturgeon stock assessments.

Gary Jennings, the Legislative Commissioner from Florida and on behalf of the Resolutions Committee, read the resolution thanking the Delaware Commissioners and staff for hosting a wonderful annual meeting.

The ASC presented an updated version of the Commission's stock assessment schedule, with the following changes:

- The 2025 Atlantic croaker benchmark was moved to 2026
- The 2026 Atlantic migratory cobia benchmark was moved to 2027 and changed to an update
- The 2026 striped bass update was moved to 2027 and changed to a benchmark
- The 2026 spiny dogfish update was moved to 2027
- The 2026 winter flounder benchmark is tentatively scheduled for 2027 and changed to a benchmark
- The 2026 spot benchmark was moved to 2027
- The 2027 black drum benchmark was changed to an update

Assessments for Spanish mackerel (2027) and weakfish (2028) have been added. In 2029, the following species will have potential updates: black sea bass, bluefish, river herring, scup, and summer flounder. Horseshoe crab and tautog will also have benchmarks in 2029. In 2030, American shad and American lobster will undergo a benchmark and sea herring will undergo an update.

The Policy Board discussed the need for more information on the socioeconomic impacts for actions being considered by species management boards. It was noted that the lack of underlying data needed to do socioeconomic analysis is often insufficient or does not exist. The Board tasked the Committee on Economics and Social Science to prioritize the data needs to provide some basic information to the species management boards that the states could collect.

Effective January 1, 2024, NOAA Fisheries changed the federal regulations for Atlantic shark fisheries to automatically open the commercial fishing year on January 1 of each year under the base quotas and default retention limits. The Commission sets coastal shark specifications based on federal regulations for Atlantic coastal shark fisheries. The Policy Board approved opening the season on January 1, 2026, with a commercial possession limit of 55 large coastal sharks (LCS) per vessel per trip (i.e., aggregated LCS and hammerhead shark management groups) and 8 blacknose sharks per vessel trip (excluding sandbar sharks). The commercial possession limit is subject to change based on landings. The states will follow NOAA Fisheries for in-season changes to the commercial possession limit.

Chris Batsavage from North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries reported that the R/V Carolina Coast, which is used to conduct the Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey, is no longer structurally sound. The survey, which began in 1987, is conducted each June and September in Pamlico Sound and its tributaries. Data from this survey are used in the summer flounder and weakfish stock assessments, the spot and croaker traffic light analyses, and ongoing stock assessments. Another survey vessel is unavailable, so the survey will not be conducted this year, and it is uncertain whether or when it will resume. If the survey resumes in the future, then it will likely be a new time series due to the lack of vessel calibration with the Carolina coast.

A stock assessment for Atlantic cobia began in March 2024 through the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process but a staffing change paused the assessment until a new lead analyst could begin work. The Commission will lead the assessment process and SEDAR will coordinate a Peer Review Workshop (SEDAR 95). Staff are currently working to re-start the assessment and transition to the Commission assessment process. With the lead analyst starting in early 2026, the expected completion date for the assessment is 2027. One factor affecting the expected completion date is the terminal year of the assessment. If the terminal year is 2024 and uses the current MRIP Fishing Effort Survey (FES) estimates, the assessment could possibly be completed by early-mid 2027. If the terminal year is 2025 and incorporates the recalibrated MRIP FES data, which are expected to be available mid-2026, the assessment could potentially be completed by mid-late 2027. Other factors affecting the timeline include any challenges with potential modeling approaches, as cobia is a relatively data-limited species requiring development of a new index of abundance, if possible.

Work on the 2028 Atlantic sturgeon benchmark will begin this fall with a call for nominations to the Stock Assessment Subcommittee and development of terms of reference.

For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Fisheries Policy Director, at tkerns@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

Motions

Move to approve the Commission's stock assessment schedule as presented today

Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passed by consent.

Move to adopt the 2026 coastal shark specifications matching the default season start date and retention limits as specified by the National Marine Fisheries Service final rule published on November 8, 2023 (88 FR 77039). The fishing season will open on January 1, 2026 with a commercial possession limit of 55 large coastal sharks (LCS) other than sandbar sharks per vessel per trip (i.e., aggregated LCS and hammerhead shark management groups) and 8 blacknose sharks per vessel trip. The commercial possession limit is subject to change; states will follow NMFS for in-season changes to the commercial possession limit.

Motion made by Ms. Burgess and seconded by Mr. Haymans. Motion passes by consent with one abstention by NH.