



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission April 15, 2021 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the April 15, 2021 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually. All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#). The full meeting can be viewed on [DMF's YouTube channel](#).

Action Items

Commercial Striped Bass Limits. The MFAC voted (6-2) in favor of adopting the Director's recommendation to amend the commercial striped bass limits for 2021. This action will open the commercial striped bass fishery on June 15 with three consecutive open fishing days (Monday - Wednesday), then on October 1 the number of open consecutive fishing days will increase to five (Monday – Friday), and the fishery will close on November 15 if the quota is not taken before then. This proposal is designed to provide the commercial fishery with additional access to the commercial quota allocated to the state by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

There was some discussion regarding this recommendation. The conversation focused on this recommendation being an access issue as opposed to a conservation issue. The MFAC favored conservation being addressed on a coastwide basis through the ASMFC. There was also debate regarding the addition of fishing days during the fall and the potential for resulting market issues and user group conflicts.

Commercial Menhaden. The MFAC unanimously voted in favor of adopting the Director's recommendation affecting certain aspects of the commercial menhaden fishery. In summary, this action will: (1) establish a maximum purse seine size of 450' x 48' for all open access fishermen and limited access permit holders fishing during the small-scale and incidental catch fishery; (2) require the immediate (at-sea) storage of menhaden into 55-gallon barrels or standard fish totes for all open access fishermen and limited access permit holders fishing during the small-scale and incidental catch fishery; (3) adopt a volumetric equivalency of 350 pounds of menhaden per 55-gallon barrel or 117 pounds of menhaden per level filled standard fish tote; (4) define a standard fish tote as measuring 28" length by 16" width by 11" depth; (5) implement a 6,000 pound trip limit for open access fishermen during the Episodic Event Set-Aside fishery; and (6) require any commercial fishermen participating in the Episodic Event Set-Aside fishery to hold a bait dealer permit and report their harvest nightly into SAFIS as a bait dealer. There were questions regarding potential vessel stability issues stemming from the at-sea storage requirement and user-group conflicts if the maximum purse seine size were to have a spatial impact on fishing activities.

Housekeeping. The MFAC unanimously voted in favor of adopting three housekeeping recommendations from the Director. The first recommendation would require black sea bass pot ghost panels to have an unobstructed opening measuring at least 3" by 6". The second recommendation would rescind all existing regulations governing purse seining for Atlantic bluefin tuna in favor of a strict

prohibition on this activity in state waters. The last recommendation clarified the use of certain ground gear is allowed when fishing trawls in North Shore Exemption Areas 1A and 1B.

Discussion Items

Update on Protected Species Issues. DMF briefed the MFAC on pending draft regulations affecting buoy line marking for lobster and crab trap gear. The regulations were being proposed in response to NOAA's ongoing Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan regulations and the state's Incidental Take Permit application to NOAA for right whales. The proposed rules seek to differentiate gear fished in state waters from adjacent jurisdictions to better identify the source of future potential entanglements and safeguard Massachusetts fishermen from having their gear potentially misidentified if an entanglement were to occur. DMF also provide the MFAC with an update on weak rope distribution to commercial trap fishermen.

Updates from the ASMFC. DMF provided a brief update on happenings at the ASMFC. There was a joint ASMFC's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council in early April. Final action on the Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment (affecting all three species) was postponed until December 2021. The purpose of this delay is to allow for additional progress to be made on the Recreational Reform Initiative and additional allocations options (within the range of alternatives) to be reviewed by ASMFC and MAFMC staff. Regardless of this postponement, the implementation of any revised allocations is not expected to occur until 2023. The implications for recreational fisheries management in 2022 is uncertain. However, it is expected the ongoing nature of these actions, as well as updated stock assessments to be completed this summer, will factor into the process. Additionally, the ASMFC recently posted the agenda for its May meeting. Items of interest include: (1) determining the issues to be included in Draft Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass; (2) the Menhaden Board determining whether to initiate a management action to consider revisions to the commercial quota allocations; (3) and the Policy Board's review of an appeal from New York on the state-by-state commercial black sea bass reallocation method approved in February. Considering the breadth of allocation issues facing the ASMFC, a working group has been developed to address possible methods to deal with this challenging and contentious subject.

Presentation on Massachusetts Ocean Acidification Commission

DMF provided the MFAC with a brief presentation on the Massachusetts Ocean Acidification Commission. The presentation described what ocean acidification is and who is participating in the Ocean Acidification Commission, covered the basics of the Commission's report to the Massachusetts legislature, and provided additional details on potential legislation.

Upcoming Meetings

DMF and the MFAC agreed to cancel the upcoming May 13, 2021 and June 17, 2021 MFAC business meetings. In lieu of holding these two business meetings, a single business meeting has been scheduled for June 3, 2021 at 9AM. The purpose of this change in scheduling is to accommodate an expedited rule making schedule for pending buoy line marking rules for the lobster and crab trap fishery.

The June 3, 2021 meeting will be held virtually via Zoom. Information regarding the meeting will be published on the [MFAC's website](#). If you would like to obtain any materials regarding past or upcoming MFAC business meetings, please contact Jared Silva at DMF (617-634-9573 or jared.silva@mass.gov).