



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission August 19, 2021 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the August 19, 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

In-Season Adjustments to the 2021 Commercial Black Sea Bass Limits. By a vote of 6-2, the MFAC voted to approve two changes to the 2021 commercial black sea bass limits affecting the directed pot and hook and line fisheries. First, the MFAC approved changes to the number of open fishing days. Effective, August 30, DMF will add Mondays and Wednesdays as open fishing days allowing these directed commercial fisheries to operate Sunday – Thursday. Then on October 1, DMF will eliminate the remaining closed fishing days (Fridays and Saturdays) and allow these directed commercial fisheries to operate seven days per week. Second, the MFAC approved increasing the trip limits for these gears by 25% beginning on August 30. Accordingly, the black sea bass pot trip limit will increase from 400 pounds to 500 pounds and the hook and line trip limit will increase from 200 pounds to 250 pounds.

Items for Future Public Hearing

Adjusting Timing of Inshore Squid Fishery. DMF briefed the MFAC on its pending public hearing proposal to adjust the timing of the inshore squid trawl fishery. This proposal seeks to extend the fishery from April 23 – June 9 to April 23 – June 15, but eliminate the regulatory language whereby the Director is expected to make a determination about whether to extend the fishery past the closure date. This item will likely go out to public hearing during the winter of 2021 – 2022 for potential implementation in 2022.

Setting of Federal Winter Period Scup Trip Limits. DMF briefed the MFAC on its pending public hearing proposal to adjust how the state sets its winter period scup trip limits. The Winter I (January 1 – April 30) and Winter II (October 1 – December 31) are federally managed quota periods subject to federal possession limits and state landing limits. At present, DMF uses its declaration process to establish the landing limits for this commensurate with the federal possession limits. DMF's proposal seeks to simplify this in two ways. First, DMF proposes to adopt a nominal state-waters harvest and retention limit for these periods—1,500 pounds from October 1 – April 22 matching the state's summertime trip limit and 2,000 pounds from April 23 – April 30 matching the scup bycatch allowance for small mesh trawlers set forth in the federal and interstate FMP. Second, DMF proposes to allow federal permit holders fishing in federal waters to transit and land scup in Massachusetts in accordance with their federal limits.

Discussion Items

Quota Managed Species Update. DMF provided the MFAC with an update on commercial fisheries quota utilization so far in 2021. This discussion focused on black sea bass, summer flounder, striped bass, menhaden and horseshoe crabs. DMF also reviewed its decision to issue Letters of Authorization to all

Coastal Access Permit holders with horseshoe crab landings this season increasing the horseshoe crab trip limit to 400 crabs to meet biomedical demand.

Update on Protected Species Management. DMF staff provided an update on protected species management issues. First, DMF informed the MFAC that NOAA Fisheries has proposed listing Massachusetts fish pot and lobster pot fisheries as a Category II fishery on its 2022 List of Fisheries under the Marine Mammal Protection Act with the lobster fishery being listed separately from the larger Northeast Lobster Trap Fishery. This is a critical step in DMF potentially obtaining an Incidental Take Permit application for right whales. Second, NOAA Fisheries has reconvened its Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) to develop strategies to reduce the risk of mortality and serious injury to right whales by 60-80% in the northeast sink gillnet fishery and mixed species trap fisheries. DMF discussed the presumptive timeline for federal rule making. Additionally, DMF explained that given the ITP application, it will likely be necessary to take additional action to manage the state-waters gillnet fishery in the Gulf of Maine to reduce entanglement risks. However, similar actions will not likely be imposed on the state's fish pot and conch pot fisheries, as these are summertime fisheries south and west of Cape Cod where there is negligible co-occurrence with right whales.

CARES Act Relief Program Update. DMF staff informed the MFAC that applications for the second round of CARES Act relief were sent out in late July. DMF held four working group sessions in recent weeks and were working with Fishing Partnership's Navigator program to help fishermen and seafood dealers complete their applications. Applications were due by August 28 and DMF was optimistic payments may be issued as soon as early October.

Updates on August ASMFC Meeting and Joint ASMFC/MAFMC Meeting. DMF staff presented on recent ASMFC and joint ASMFC/MAFMC meetings. On lobster/Jonah crab, the ASMFC was working on several initiatives including: electronic tracking requirements for the federal lobster and Jonah crab fishery; establishing pre-defined management triggers to respond to the expected decline in GOM/GB lobster stock, which may include changes to gauge sizes; and a first-ever assessment of the Jonah crab stock. The ASMFC's Striped Bass Board was focused on the development of Amendment 7 and Delaware's request for an addendum to allow the transfer of commercial quotas among states. It was also confirmed that Addendum VI exceeded its target 18% reduction in total removals in 2020 compared to 2017; the estimated reduction was 28%. Through an appeal, NY was granted a 1% increase in its initial black sea bass commercial quota allocation in response to increasing biomass in Long Island Sound. The Menhaden Board initiated an addendum to consider changes to state allocations, the EESA program, and the incidental catch and small-scale fishery allowance. The joint ASMFC/MAFMC meeting focused on the setting of annual specifications for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish for 2022-2023, and continued development of a harvest control rule approach to recreational management, which would move away from using direct harvest to annual recreational harvest limit comparisons for setting recreational fishing limits and incorporate other stock status indicators into this decision making.

NEFMC Updates. Staff briefed the MFAC on NEFMC appointment updates, scientific developments, and management activities. On the science side, the discussion focused on stock assessments, the Atlantic cod stock structure work, and the sea scallop survey working group. On management, DMF provided updates on various FMPs, electronic VTRs, wind farms, right whales, and climate change planning.

Shellfish Program Updates. DMF staff provided a brief presentation on the extensive PSP closures this summer in Massachusetts Bay and the closures in the Nauset system. DMF informed the MFAC that the Massachusetts Shellfish Initiative had completed its strategic plan. One aspect of it called for the formalization of the Shellfish Advisory Panel (SAP) in statute, which was established in this year's

budget. DMF reviewed the roster, which included a member of the MFAC. The Director indicated he intended to appoint Bill Doyle as the MFAC's delegate to the SAP. DMF then discussed a budget earmark for SMAST to conduct hydrographic modeling, which may in turn assist DMF in addressing water quality and classification issues related to wastewater treatment plants.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will meeting again on September 23, 2021. 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).