



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission August 21, 2025 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the August 21, 2025 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held at DFW Field Headquarters at 1 Rabbit Hill Rd, Westborough, MA. A recording is available for viewing on [DMF's YouTube Channel](#). All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

Fishery Performance Review

DMF provided the MFAC with a review of fisheries landings, value, and trends in 2024 and presented on the performance of 2025 quota managed fisheries.

Discussion Items

Interstate Fisheries Management. DMF reviewed the recent joint meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). This included the 2026-2027 specification setting for bluefish, summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass based on the results of their 2025 stock assessments. DMF anticipates the coastwide commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) will be increased for bluefish, summer flounder, and black sea bass (all by 30% or more). For scup, the commercial quota is expected to decrease slightly both years whereas the RHL is expected to increase in 2026 before decreasing in 2027. The increase to the bluefish RHL in conjunction with recent catch trends resulted in the MAFMC and ASMFC increasing the recreational bag limits, whereas the other species' recreational measures will be determined over the winter. Per the Recreational Measure Setting Process, an increased RHL does not always lead to a relaxation of measures (nor a reduced RHL to a constriction of measures). Additionally, DMF provided an update on the development of the recreational sector separation draft amendment for bluefish, summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass, specifically the discontinuation of options that would have formally separated the private and for-hire modes into sectors with their own catch targets; other options for mode management will continue to be developed.

DMF also discussed the August 2025 ASMFC meeting, with a focus on the approval of Striped Bass Draft Addendum III for public comment. The draft addendum includes options for a coastwide standard definition for total length measurement; mandating point of harvest tagging in the commercial fishery; adjusting the timing of the recreational season in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay fishery; and supporting stock rebuilding by reducing fishery removals by 12% applied equally to both the recreational and commercial sectors. Options to achieve fishery removals include a quota reduction for the commercial fishery and size limit and/or closed seasons for the recreational fishery. Coastwide public hearings are being scheduled for the month of September, including two in Massachusetts on September 25 (Hilton Hotel, Woburn) and September 30 (Mass Maritime, Buzzards Bay). The ASMFC Striped Bass Board is expected to take final action on the addendum in October, with the expectation that states will

adopt conforming measures for 2026 (with possible longer timeline for any changes to the tagging requirements).

Commercial Striped Bass Management Considerations for 2026. DMF recently convened a commercial striped bass industry advisory panel and the MFAC's Striped Bass Focus Group to discuss the management of Massachusetts' commercial striped bass fishery in the context of Draft Addendum III and evolving management objectives. Based on these meetings, DMF developed a framework for potential management actions. For 2026, DMF intends to enact a moratorium on permit issuance by limiting renewals only to those individuals who held an endorsement in 2024 or 2025. Then for 2027, DMF may further reduce access based on to-be-developed activity criteria, particularly if a harvester tagging program is adopted. Additionally, DMF will consider making the limited entry endorsement owner-operator and non-transferable. If the endorsement is established as non-transferable, inactive permits would be retired and made available to new entrants based on a waiting list or lottery process according to exit:entry ratios. To address quota utilization and possibly extend the season into August, DMF will consider a later start date (e.g., June 23 rather than June 16) or reduced daily trip limit (e.g., 10 fish rather than 15 fish). Lastly, DMF will consider requiring that harvesters bring all commercially harvested striped bass, including those being kept for personal use, to a dealer for weigh-in and reporting. DMF will return to the MFAC in the fall with the full public hearing proposal.

Petition to Close Three Bays to Horseshoe Crab Harvest. In April 2025, the Pine Barrens Alliance petitioned the MFAC and DMF to close the Three Bays (Plymouth, Kingston, and Duxbury Bays) to horseshoe crab harvest and provided an extensive report in support of their petition. The MFAC granted the petitioners an opportunity to speak to their petition and DMF to analyze the petition and its claims. The MFAC did not support bringing the petition to public hearing. The general consensus among MFAC members was that the state-wide spawning closure (April 15 – June 7) likely eliminated all harvest in the Three Bays based on data available. Therefore, a harvest closure would likely be inconsequential and any continued challenges facing this species in this area were likely not related to fishing mortality.

Transition to Electronic Harvester Reporting. DMF notified the MFAC of its intention to transition all commercial permit holders to electronic harvester reporting by 2027. The MFAC strongly supported this initiative.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will meet next on September 18 in Westborough.