

Commercial Fisheries Commission Draft Business Meeting Minutes

October 6, 2025

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA

In attendance:

Commercial Fisheries Commission: Dan McKiernan, Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries; Alison Brizius, Director of the Office of Coastal Zone Management; Roger Berkowitz; Beth Casoni; Hollie Emery; Al Cottone; Tim Brady; Jackie Odell; Vito Giacalone; Kevin Stokesbury. Virtually: Eric Hansen; Aubrey Church; Ed Barrett. Absent: Katie Almeida; Gordon Carr; Pamela LaFreniere; Angela Sanfilippo.

Consensus Building Institute (Facilitators): Pat Field, Abby Fullem

Division of Marine Fisheries Staff: Story Reed; Bob Glenn; Brad Schondelmeier; Wendy Mainardi; Bradlie Morgan. Virtually: Jared Siva; Melanie Griffin; Kelly Whitmore

Office of Coastal Zone Management Staff: Virtually: Todd Callaghan; Anne Donovan; Tyler Soleau

Department of Fish and Game Staff: Commissioner Tom O'Shea; Sefatia Romeo-Theken

Department of Agricultural Resources: Virtually: Bonita Oehlke

Members of the Public: John Regan; Susanne Altenburger; Julia Logan. Virtually: Casaundra Healy; Andrew Applegate; Frank Mirarchi; Jynessa Dutka-Gianelli; Lela Schlenker; Lisa Engler; Valerie Nelson; Ellen Cebula; Kristin Uiterwyk; Idemelo.

Welcome and Introductions

Pat Field of the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) and Commercial Fisheries Commission (CFC) co-chairs Daniel McKiernan, Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), and Alison Brizius, Director of the Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), welcomed the group to today's meeting. CFC members, staff members of the DMF and CZM, and presenters introduced themselves. Field outlined the meeting's agenda. Field and DMF Director McKiernan discussed the timeline of the CFC's annual report.

Review and Approve the Minutes

Pat Field asked if there were any requests to amend the April business meeting minutes, June business meeting minutes, or *ResilientCoasts* meeting minutes. There were no requests for amendments. **Pat Field asked for a roll-call vote to approve the minutes as presented. The minutes were approved (12-0), with two members absent for the vote.**

Ports and Ports Infrastructure

Update on MA Fishing Ports Survey

DMF Deputy Director Story Reed presented on DMF's Port Profile project update. The port profile project describes the commercial fishing activity and port-side infrastructure in each coastal municipality to help inform public policy, prioritize spending, improve infrastructure, and enhance industry-related decision making. The initial report was published in 2021 and is now being updated for 2026.

McKiernan explained that to update the report DMF is developing surveys to better understand overall trends, specific conditions across coastal towns, and constituents' priorities. The survey questions are being vetted through the CFC's Port Profile Focus Group to the Urban Harbors Institute (UHI) at UMass Boston. The CFC Focus Group will provide feedback on these surveys later this winter and UHI will then develop a survey to be shared with fishers and another with harbormasters.

Reed remarked on the best ways to distribute surveys, noting the CFC's potential role in reaching broader audiences. Beth Casoni suggested sharing the survey at events such as the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association's (MLA) annual trade show. Director McKiernan highlighted the importance of collaborative relationships with constituents such as those with the MLA.

Reed and Casoni discussed survey outreach, such as through email campaigns or permit renewals.

Ed Barrett asked whether the harbormaster survey would include questions on mooring waitlists. He voiced concern about the prevalence of long mooring waitlists and high mooring costs. Reed responded that the survey would include questions targeting mooring waitlists, commercial fishing mooring needs, mooring pricing, and open-ended questions.

Sefatia Romeo-Theken noted that groups like the Seaport Economic Council should be asked to complete surveys. She echoed Barrett's suggestion to include questions on moorings, including temporary moorings in harbors.

Frank Mirarchi added that earlier versions of the Port Profile Report have been helpful to the fishing industry. He asked if the new report would include elements of the commercial fishing industry that have significantly changed since the report was last published, such as aquaculture, charter boat businesses, and the Northern Gulf of Maine scallop fishery. Reed responded that these aspects would be captured through fishery statistics and survey responses.

Director McKiernan, Mirarchi, and Reed discussed data confidentiality rules and how this impacts DMF publishing certain information if there are not more than two fishers, aquaculturists, or dealers involved in a certain commercial activity. Reed noted that in cases where data cannot be published, narratives can be used to illustrate trends.

Al Cottone asked if changes in fishery participation or shifts in industry would be included in the survey. Reed responded that questions would address these shifts, underscoring the importance of conducting this assessment regularly.

Jackie Odell asked whether the survey would capture non-resident permit holders who contribute to commercial landings. Reed confirmed that these constituents will be targeted.

The Port Profile Focus Group will be reconvened later this year. Field noted that once the survey results are complete, the CFC can work to develop recommendations for the legislature to address needs.

Office of Coastal Zone Management Designated Port Area Review and Report

Tyler Soleau presented on CZM's Designated Port Area (DPA) Review. He provided background on the DPA Program. It was established in Massachusetts in 1978 to recognize and protect water-dependent industries, thereby maximizing the use of established working waterfronts. Ten DPA's have been established: Gloucester, Salem, Lynn, Mystic River, Chelsea Creek, East Boston, South Boston, Weymouth, New Bedford/Fairhaven, and Mount Hope Bay. Soleau outlined the responsibilities of CZM, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and municipalities under DPAs.

The most recent DPA Program Assessment began in 2023, with a goal to identify the DPA Program's strengths, challenges, and opportunities to improve. The assessment examined five focus areas: infrastructure and land use, regulations, funding, community impacts, and coastal resilience. The final assessment report was released in July 2025 following extensive stakeholder engagement, economic analysis, and recommendation development. While the economic analysis indicated economic benefits of DPAs, Soleau suggested it underestimated the full impact of DPAs due to its focus on employment data.

Soleau noted the importance of stakeholder feedback to develop recommendations for each focus area. He then outlined recommendations for each focus area.

For infrastructure and land use, recommendations included:

1. Establish a commission on port development to recommend strategic vision for ports.
2. Develop an industry-based needs assessments to identify areas of growth.
3. Integrate DPA considerations into other state initiatives, such as CZM's *ResilientCoasts*.
4. Create an online marketplace to identify DPA vacancies and connect users.
5. Explore the development of a pilot program to evaluate new and innovative uses.

For regulatory frameworks, recommendations included:

1. Develop guidance to clarify existing regulatory flexibility and highlight best practices.
2. Proactively conduct DPA assessments and boundary reviews.
3. Engage in ongoing permit streamlining initiatives throughout the state.
4. Assess compliance with regulatory requirements within each DPA for consistency.
5. Develop best practices for the design of buffer areas around DPAs.

For funding and financing, recommendations included:

1. Leverage existing funding mechanisms to support DPAs, including grant programs.
2. Support WDI users and host municipalities in accessing federal resources.
3. Explore mechanisms to allow private WDI users to be eligible for state funding for projects directed at public benefit.
4. Develop port infrastructure and facility improvement program.

For community impact, recommendations included:

1. Promote opportunities and programs for WDI workforce training through partnerships.
2. Develop incentives to incorporate safe public access.
3. Support efforts to minimize impacts of DPA on Environmental Justice communities and surrounding communities.
4. Work with partner agencies to develop programs to decarbonize port infrastructure.

For coastal resilience, recommendations included:

1. Integrate consideration of the unique needs of DPA's into CZM's *ResilientCoasts* Initiative.

2. Identify funding opportunities for coastal resilience.
3. Support WDI users in the development of operational response and recovery plans to continue access after severe coastal storms.

For communication, engagement, and technical support, recommendations included:

1. Create communication and outreach materials to improve awareness of the DPA regulatory process.
2. Conduct outreach and engagement with stakeholders to build awareness of DPAs.
3. Develop webinars and office hours and other technical assistance to support navigating the DPA program.
4. Feature information on DPA uses and activities online and highlight role of DPAs' role in driving the blue economy.

Soleau remarked on the importance of supporting DPAs through a forum like the CFC. Vito Giacalone asked about plans to assess the progress of recommendations in the future. Soleau and Director Alison Brizius noted that some recommendations have already been outlined in the Mass Ready Act, but partnerships are essential for implementation.

Field and Soleau discussed the importance of community and stakeholder input in reviewing DPA boundaries.

Mass Ready Act Update

CZM Director Brizius then introduced the Mass Ready Act. She explained that the Mass Ready Act was released in 2024 by Governor Maura Healey to support and advance the priorities across Massachusetts environmental agencies, including promoting a sustainable economy and environmental resilience. For CZM and partner agencies, this included an authorization of \$200 million for the *Resilient Coasts* Initiative and DPA advancement, as well as legislative elements like flood disclosures.

Commissioner Tom O'Shea outlined authorizations for marine habitat restoration, development of nature-based solutions using oyster reefs and artificial reefs, and diadromous fish migration support. DFG also received \$20 million for community biodiversity, which can be applied to marine and inland fisheries. The Office of Fishing and Boating Access (OFBA) will also receive funding to support coastal access.

Brizius outlined specific allocations towards dams and coastal marine infrastructure, parks and trails, transportation infrastructure, and solid waste management.

Field added that the Mass Ready Act also recommends developing a Ports Commission to build a vision for Massachusetts ports. The Ports Commission will be comprised of 21

members, including one member from each state port, and likely at least one commercial fishing industry stakeholder.

Commissioner O’Shea and Director Brizius discussed coordinating the CFC’s annual report with the timeline of Mass Ready Act’s anticipated implementation in 2026.

Aubrey Church asked about the possibility of creating additional DPAs to represent the South Shore and Cape Cod area. Brizius noted that DPAs were initially created in 1970 to protect existing heavy industrial uses; however, there are opportunities for communities to advocate for additional DPAs and obtain funding for mixed-use waterfronts, such as through the Seaport Economic Council (SEC).

Jackie Odell asked if there were any considerations for offshore wind (OSW) in the Mass Ready Act. Brizius responded that there is nothing specific on OSW; rather, the bill focuses on port infrastructure.

Pat Field and Vito Giacalone discussed potential funding sources for publicly and privately owned port areas. Giacalone noted the challenges to implement necessary improvements in DPAs such as Gloucester Harbor, adding that these changes are important to support commercial fishing. Field and Brizius discussed the efforts to create more opportunities for funding. Field and McKiernan discussed Maine’s strategy for supporting small ports through grants and suggested exploring it further at a future meeting.

Flounder Processing and Chokepoints

DMF Director McKiernan noted that DMF’s Seafood Marketing Advisory Committee recently met and discussed concerns related to the low value of various flounder species and wanted to bring this issue to the attention of the CFC for their consideration.

Story Reed shared the Seafood Marketing Advisory Committee’s current efforts to spread awareness and increase consumer interest through consumer surveys, recipe cards, and outreach materials. However, the market is also constrained by processing limitations and market volatility.

Frank Mirarchi of the South Shore Seafood Exchange outlined the undervaluation of flounders. He listed a variety of potential causes, including how catch may be limited by the constraints presented by choke species in the northeast multispecies (groundfish) sector management program. For instance, certain flounders are avoided by fishing vessels even when they are abundant to avoid the incidental catch of choke species. Mirarchi noted that despite apparent demand, processing capacity for flounder is limited due to a

lack of human and physical infrastructure and an unstable regulatory environment that constrains investment in this infrastructure. Therefore, while DMF's efforts to promote demand-side support, this challenge also necessitates supply-side solutions. Mirarchi noted the Seafood Marketing Advisory Committee has discussed mechanical processing as a potential solution and asked for the CFC's input.

Field and Reed noted that while there is not a specific recommendation proposed, they welcomed potential solutions from the CFC. Reed added that this could be a topic for a Focus Group that spans across multiple commissions.

Kevin Stokesbury asked to clarify the difference in filet yield between mechanical and hand-filleting. Giacalone responded that yield can increase from 25% through hand-filleting to nearly 30% with a machine. Stokesbury asked if there is a market for whole fish, and Giacalone said there was not.

Odell and Giacalone discussed the availability of cutting machines in Massachusetts. Giacalone cautioned that machines can be unreliable and require experts to troubleshoot, and as such, may not present a viable solution.

Odell and Cottone discussed federal purchasing programs to help stabilize struggling fisheries. Odell suggested a state-supported purchasing program. Cottone added that the flounder market collapsed following quota reductions, and mechanical filleting will help support the fishery if a workforce does not return. Roger Berkowitz echoed Odell and Cottone. He also advocated for developing a comprehensive approach to increase demand, and the use of technology (e.g., nitrogen freezing facilities) to handle and store product.

Beth Casoni suggested that the CFC write a letter in response to the federal administration's Executive Order to Restore America's Seafood Competitiveness to ask for support with seafood processing in Massachusetts.

John Regan of the New Bedford Port Authority added that site visits will help to understand processors' needs.

Ed Barrett echoed others' concerns, adding that flatfish are difficult to find on local menus.

Mirarchi voiced agreement with Odell and Berkowitz on purchasing programs and a comprehensive approach to supporting industry to address issues related to both supply and demand.

Story Reed suggested the Food Security Infrastructure Grants (FSIG) to help support the industry's fish processing needs. The next round of FSIG will begin in the spring of 2026.

Sefatia Romeo-Theken shared a pilot program called Fish to Plate that will provide fish to the underserved through food banks and noted its potential connection with this initiative.

Director McKiernan remarked on DMF's efforts to increase awareness through social media and outreach. He added that a meeting of stakeholders will be held to better understand their needs, and echoed Reed's suggestion to support fish processing through FSIGs. Dan noted that DMF would look into institutional purchasing.

Field suggested convening a Focus Group on this topic. The group would include Story Reed (and other DMF staff), Beth Casoni, Roger Berkowitz, Gordon Carr, Frank Mirarchi, and Sefatia Romeo-Theken.

Ed Barrett asked for FSIG recipients to be made public as soon as possible.

Offshore Wind

General Offshore Wind (OSW) Update

Brad Schondelmeier outlined the various offshore wind (OSW) projects along the coast of the northeast United States. Currently, one project is complete (South Fork), four are under (Vineyard 1, Revolution, Sunrise, and Empire), and several remain in the permitting process (including potential projects in the Gulf of Maine). Those four projects currently under construction are at various stages of completion, including installing blades, subsea drilling, fish monitoring deployment, and deploying monopiles. Revolution was paused by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) in August, but a preliminary injunction allowed them to resume work in September.

Schondelmeier then updated the CFC on the Massachusetts Fisheries Innovation Fund. The request for proposal period ended on August 29 with 20 proposals received. Contracts will be awarded by the end of the year to allow projects to begin in 2026.

He then discussed efforts to standardize AIS on OSW turbines. The Fisheries Working Group for Offshore Wind (FWG) has aimed to provide guidance on this issue. Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA) Joint Industry Task Force previously conducted a survey, whereby most fishing respondents favored AIS beacons on all OSW turbines. However, federal guidance is lacking, creating inconsistent practices across developers. Schondelmeier supported a one-day workshop to discuss this issue further with developers.

Beth Casoni asked if the workshop could be scheduled during lobster closures to accommodate these constituents.

Director McKiernan suggested pushing for interstate collaboration for further consistency.

Odell asked about engagement with the fishing industry before the lease areas were developed. Director McKiernan responded that the FWG meetings aimed to address this need and focused on creating 1-mile spacing between turbines to allow for navigation. Further, developer meetings were largely held with southern states, leading to less engagement with New England stakeholders.

Kevin Stokesbury noted that he was part of a fishery commission in New Bedford which examined relevant fishing areas and different developers consulted different advisory commissions, creating inconsistency. Field and Stokesbury discussed the decision process to develop transit lanes.

Ed Barrett voiced frustration with the lack of engagement by developers and federal government with the fishing industry. He noted potential impacts of OSW on fisheries and wondered when this would be recognized. Brad Schondelmeier responded that OSW developer fishery monitoring is still underway, including acoustic telemetry tagging of benthic invertebrates and fish. However, the impact will not be understood for years. Schondelmeier added that preliminary surveys and monitoring projects were also done before laying cable corridors and construction. Barrett then asked about retrospective mitigation. Field provided Barrett with resources on where fishermen can submit a request for reimbursement if they have been impacted. Field, Barrett, and Berkowitz discussed plans for mitigation and future development.

Stokesbury and Odell voiced concern about OSW impacts on biodiversity and fishery resources.

Odell asked for an update at a future meeting on developer monitoring and how the fishing industry can provide input to inform future projects. Stokesbury added that some of UMass' research surveyed pre-construction and during construction and will monitor Vineyard Wind post-construction. Stokesbury and Schondelmeier may be able to speak on this more at a future CFC meeting, as well as at the FWG meeting.

Commissioner O'Shea suggested adding this issue to the CFC's annual report. Field and Director McKiernan suggested discussing the annual report more deeply at the next meeting.

Field suggested more collaboration across commissions to better understand concerns and recommendations in the future. He added that the OSW Focus Group will be convened soon.

Regional Fund Administrator Update and Preparation for October Webinar

Pat Field removed this agenda item in the interest of time.

Other Issues

US Department of Agriculture Export Grants

Bonita Oehlke of Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) shared a presentation on leveraging USDA funding for export grants.

She highlighted MDAR and DMF's role in FSIG programs, rewarding more than \$24.5 million to commercial fishing and aquaculture industries since 2020. She explained that seafood programs are promoted through Food Export USA Northeast, a commodity group including MDAR.

She highlighted the importance of Massachusetts seafood as a significant export. The Branded Products program awards about \$250,000 to Massachusetts seafood products annually. She outlined requirements for this program, including: 100% US origin products or at least 50% US harvester, and small business size. The program reimburses 50% of eligible expenses, including activities that support export market development such as website development, advertising, packaging, and trade shows. The program also supports seafood businesses through identifying global markets.

Oehlke highlighted DMF's role in supporting Mass. Avenue at the Seafood Expo of North America in Boston, which highlights local companies.

CFC members were encouraged to reach out to Oehlke with any questions.

Release of MA Biodiversity Plan

Commissioner Tom O'Shea presented on the Biodiversity Initiative in Massachusetts and its relation to marine and commercial fisheries. The pillars of the initiative are to protect, restore, sustain, and connect across Massachusetts. O'Shea outlined potential goals and actions related to the marine environment, including convening a marine biodiversity taskforce; prioritizing comprehensive marine habitat mapping, watershed and oyster reef restoration; ensuring no net shellfish loss; investing in working waterfronts; and implementing grants to connect the marine environment with neighborhoods and schools.

Governor Healey's Biodiversity Initiative was announced at an event in Cape Cod in August, which was well-attended by commercial fishing stakeholders.

Director McKiernan added that in addition to restoring eelgrass, DMF aims to protect eelgrass habitat. Currently, DMF is working to update its surf clam management regulations to create geofences enforceable through vessel tracking technology to protect eelgrass habitat.

Ed Barrett asked about sharing details on how the Biodiversity Initiative will be implemented. O'Shea said that DFG can provide additional detail at a future discussion. Beth Casoni, Pat Field, and Commissioner O'Shea discussed the Biodiversity Initiative's goals to encourage collaboration and restoration rather than create protected areas. A task force will be used to better understand fishing stakeholder needs.

CFC Annual Report Discussion

This will be discussed further at a future meeting in the interest of time.

Public Comment and Next Steps

Aubrey Church shared that the Coast Guard Buoy Removal Plan is looking for public comment through November 15.

Ed Barrett voiced concern about the overall vulnerability of groundfish fisheries, including cod, due to reduction in quota and availability.

Susanne Altenburger of Gloucester shared the results of a white paper covering lack of fleet advancement over the past 30 years. She called for regulatory changes and technical advances to vessels. Director McKiernan asked for specific guidance on what DMF can do to address this issue.

Valerie Nelson of Gloucester echoed Barrett's frustration with the issues facing the CFC. She asked if DPA issues regarding private property can be accelerated, as this has been an issue in Gloucester for years. She noted that the Executive Order on Restoring America's Seafood Competitiveness is accepting public comment on improving fisheries management and science until October 14. She asked if any groups are voicing Massachusetts views.

Field noted that the Regional Fund Administrator will meet with the FWG and CFC on November 3. The CFC will meet next on December 12 following the FWG meeting in New Bedford.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.

Upcoming Meetings

December 12, 1 pm – 4 pm

836 S Rodney French Blvd, New Bedford, MA

SMAST East