



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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MAURA T. HEALEY
Governor


KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL
Lt. Governor

REBECCA L. TEPPER
Secretary

THOMAS K. O'SHEA
Commissioner

DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission
FROM: Daniel J. McKiernan, Director 
DATE: November 15, 2024
SUBJECT: Commercial Summer Flounder Management Proposal for Public Hearing

Overview

The memorandum advises the MFAC of several public hearing proposals to revise the commercial summer flounder (fluke) management program for 2025 along with additional considerations for 2026. These proposals respond to recent fishery performance, quota expectations, and the comments received at the November 4, 2024 industry scoping meeting at DMF's New Bedford office. These proposals are focused on the Period I (January – April 22) and Period II Summertime (April 23 – September 30) fisheries; no proposals are being made to amend the Period II Fall (October 1 – December 31) rules.

Proposals

Period I. For the 2025 Period I fishery, I intend to initiate an in-season adjustment process to reduce the 2025 Period I (January 1 – April 22) trip limit from 5,000 to as low as 2,000 pounds and potentially opt not to authorize the multi-state landing program. The public will be afforded a two-week comment period to provide DMF with feedback on these proposed actions. Then, I will provide you a final recommendation at your December business meeting so that you may vote on any trip limit adjustment and advise me on my decision regarding the multi-state landing program, thereby allowing any changes to go into effect for January 1, 2025.

Subsequently, I intend to go to public hearing this winter to consider amending the management program for this period for 2026 and beyond. This includes potentially codifying any of the changes adopted for 2025, as well as potentially reducing the Period II quota allocation from 30% to as low as 15%.

Period II Summertime. I intend to go to public hearing this winter to consider the following changes for 2025. First, reduce the initial trip limits (effective April 23) from 600 pounds to 500 pounds for net fishers and from 400 pounds to 325 pounds for hook fishers. Second, I seek to amend the existing quota-based trip limit reduction trigger. Currently, if 75% of the quota is taken on or before August 1, then trip limits are automatically reduced to 400 pounds for net fishers and 200 pounds for hook fishers. My proposal would maintain the existing 75% quota use threshold but consider pushing back the use-by date to August 15. Additionally, I propose to adjust the triggered trip limit for hook fishers to be 250 pounds, rather than 200 pounds, which corrects an oversight contained in last year's rule making. Lastly, I want to adopt a new end of season quota-based trip limit reduction trigger. My proposal here would be to establish a trip limit of not more than 200 pounds for all gear types should 90% of the quota be reached on or before September 1.

Additionally, I will consider public comment to eliminate Fridays and/or Saturdays as an open fishing day. While this is not a preferred option at this time, I do want to hear from stakeholders regarding the pros and cons of constraining fishing effort through limiting the number of days per week that summer flounder can be landed.

Lastly, at this juncture, I intend to maintain the multi-day program for trawlers in 2025. This program allows fishers with a Coastal Access Permit and Fluke endorsement to obtain a Letter of Authorization to land two daily limits of lawfully caught and retained summer flounder over consecutive open commercial fishing days. However, during the public hearing process, I intend to take comment on whether or not certain aspects should be modified to enhance accountability, if tagging should continue to be required, and whether the program should be annually discontinued once the end of season quota use trigger is reached and the trip limit becomes an effective bycatch limit (presuming such a quota use trigger is adopted).

Discussion

2025 Quota Expectations

DMF anticipates the 2025 summer flounder quota will again be set at about 600,000 pounds, similar to this year's quota (except with a possible overage deduction of about 20,000 pounds). Note that the quota specifications for 2026 and 2027 will be set in 2025.

Recent Management Changes

The current management program for summer flounder is described in Table 1. However, this management program has evolved over the past several years in response to changing fishery performance and quota availability. These changes are described in Table 2. In summary, from 2019 – 2023, DMF made a series of modifications to liberalize the Period I and Period II rules to enhance landings in response to lower effort and higher quotas. Then in 2024, DMF took several actions to constrain fishing limits in response to a substantial (56%) reduction in the state's quota¹. This included reducing the Period I and Period II Fall fishery trip limits from 10,000 pounds to 5,000 pounds and adopting quota use triggers to slow landing rates during the Period II Summertime fishery with the goal of extending the quota into the later part of the inshore fishing season. DMF opted not to make more robust changes to the 2024 Period II Summertime fishery limits because recent fishery performance indicated that such changes were not likely necessary to extend the inshore fishing season into the early fall and could result in the underutilization of the quota.

2024 Fishery Performance

In late January of 2024, DMF projected the Period I fishery would take its 30% quota allocation by February 5. Accordingly, effective February 6, the trip limit was reduced from 10,000 pounds to 100 pounds. Ultimately, Period I landings came in at about 27% of the overall quota leaving about 73% of the quota available for Period II. The Period II fishery began in earnest in late-May/early-June. Landings slowed in June in response to an increase in coastwide supply depressing the ex-vessel value but picked back up in July with banner weeks in late-July and early-August. While the fishery did not hit the 75% quota use threshold by August 1—which would have reduced the trip limits to 400 pounds for net fishers

¹ The 2023 stock assessment demonstrated that while fluke are not overfished, overfishing was occurring despite recent catch limit underages. This is because the prior assessment overestimated abundance, in large part due to the promising 2018-year class being much smaller than initially assessed. Moreover, recruitment has been below average since 2011. Using the new assessment, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) set the 2024/2025 quota at 8.79 million pounds—a 42% reduction from the 15.27-million-pound coastwide quota in 2023. Because the coastwide quota is dropping below 9.55 million pounds, the level at which quota is reallocated per Amendment 21, Massachusetts will only receive its baseline quota share of 6.82%, rather than the near 9% we received in 2022 and 2023. This brings the Commonwealth's summer flounder quota to about 600,000 pounds for 2024 and 2025.

and 200 pounds for hook fishers—this threshold was reached several days later. The full quota was then taken on August 27 with a closure effective August 28. See Figure 1.

Overall, landings in the 2024 fishery outpaced performance in recent years. This was due to several vessels becoming active in the fishery. Anecdotally, this includes several younger operators obtaining permit transfers from individuals who had retired out of the fishery and several boats who historically participate in the squid fishery opting to target fluke due to poor squid fishing conditions this year. This unanticipated increase in effort drove a faster rate of quota utilization and resulted in the quota being exhausted sooner than DMF had initially anticipated. While the quota lasted until the end of August, DMF (and most fishery participants) had hoped it would be available into September when the summer flounder remain inshore. This would allow trawlers to continue to retain a bycatch of summer flounder when targeting horseshoe crabs in the late summer and early fall² and hook fishers to target this species.

Despite the lower quota, the ex-vessel value of the fishery exceeded \$2 million, which was on par with the total value in recent years when we had higher quotas and more substantial landings (Figure 2). This was driven by a higher-than-normal ex-vessel price that was just over \$3.00 per pound (Figure 3). The average ex-vessel price per pound during the Period II summertime fishery was generally above \$4.00 and exceeded \$5.00 at times but dropped to about \$3.00 several times throughout the season due to coastwide market issues. Based on feedback from the seafood dealer sector, DMF speculates that the enhanced ex-vessel value in 2024 compared to recent years was likely driven by a decrease in the available quota and a reduced coastwide supply.

Industry Concerns

Dating back to the public process last year, there were concerns about quota utilization and an early season quota closure. These concerns persisted throughout the season. As we approached August 1 and it became clear that landings would be near—but not exceed—the 75% quota use trigger, there was substantial interest that DMF intercede in some manner to slow landings and keep the quota available into September. As discussed at the August MFAC business meeting, I considered such an action but decided against it preferring to let the season play out, particularly given the lack of consensus among the industry on whether or not an action was warranted.

On November 4, 2024, DMF held its annual industry meeting to discuss issues this past season and scope management changes for the upcoming year. Staff presented on the fishery management program, recent fishery performance, and industry-driven concerns. The presentation provided is attached to this memorandum. Industry discussion focused on three discrete issues: (1) the late-August closure; (2) effort and the rate of quota consumption; and (3) the multi-day program.

There was some concern that the late-August closure in 2024 limited the ability to access the resource throughout the remainder of the inshore season. This concern was not a consensus position. In fact, many attendees preferred taking the quota during the summer months when the ex-vessel price is generally higher instead of maintaining some quota for September when the ex-vessel price traditionally drops. Several options for maintaining some quota for the late-summer and early fall were also discussed. This included setting aside quota for September and establishing gear-specific quota allocations—neither of these options were supported³. However, there was some consensus to establish a late-season quota-based

² The bait and biomedical horseshoe crab quotas remained available into October. The bait fishery closed on October 21 and while the biomedical quota remains available, landings have begun to wane.

³ The gear-specific quota allocation proposal was one requested to allow continued rod and reel fishing into September to accommodate the Nantucket Shoals fishery. This action was not supported by the industry in attendance. Several hook fishers strongly objected. They argued any quota allocation based on the most recent years would reflect a period of relative low landings by the hook fishery and future access would be capped accordingly. This would ultimately limit the scale of the fishery

trip limit trigger that would allow for the continued retention of a bycatch of summer flounder when vessels continue to fish for horseshoe crab and other species (e.g., scup and whelk).

Performance this season also demonstrated how small changes in effort can substantially impact the rate of quota consumption in this fishery. While it is thought that effort in this fishery primarily increased this year in response to reduced squid availability—which is highly variable interannually—moving forward there was also a concern that the low catch limits for western Gulf of Maine cod expected in 2025 (and beyond) may balloon effort in the fluke fishery. Accordingly, there was some interest in slowing down quota consumption relative to 2024 and several alternatives were discussed, including trip limit reductions, amending trip limit triggers, and adding closed fishing days.

There was some support for adjusting trip limits and trip limit triggers. Regarding trip limits, some preferred a more aggressive approach, for instance returning to the historic limits of 300 pounds for net fishers and 200 for hook fishers given concerns about increasing effort. However, others felt this was unwarranted and an overly cautious approach would make the fishery unprofitable and likely cause quota underutilization. This led to some discussion about adopting a more conservative quota-use trip limit reduction trigger by either moving the use-by date back from August 1 or adopting a lower threshold than 75% quota use.

There was also some discussion about eliminating open fishing days, but this was not preferred among the attendees, as most favored the flexibility provided. It was argued that despite the fishery being open seven days per week, most do not fish more than four or five days per week and the open schedule allows them to choose better weather days to fish.

Lastly, there was ample discussion about the multi-day program, and again, there was little consensus on the subject. The dealer sector supported the program and argued it allows them to predictably pick up more substantial quantities of fish from vessels in the various discrete ports around the South Cape. Should the program be discontinued, it may make it economically challenging for this service to be maintained, particularly if coupled with reduced trip limits. Some permit holders in attendance also supported the continuation of the program given the economic benefits it provides to the industry by allowing it to operate more efficiently. Still, other permit holders expressed reservations about the continuation of the program. They argued this program was initially devised to allow the inshore fleet to more efficiently target fish as the resource has moved eastward and dockage has become less available and more expensive. However, it has evolved beyond its initial purpose and was contributing to expedited quota consumption. Of specific issue was the use of the program by vessels who traditionally fish offshore to trip fish in the Sounds and those federal waters immediately south and east of Nantucket. Some speculated that the fishing behavior of some of these vessels, as observed on AIS, likely indicated they were not complying with the daily trip limit and/or were likely high grading their catch. Accordingly, some attendees thought the program should be discontinued, made unavailable to offshore boats, or amended to more closely uphold its initial purpose.

Public Hearing Proposals

I have developed the above-described public hearing proposals affecting the commercial summer flounder fishery in response to recent fishery performance, quota expectations for the upcoming year, and comment provided by stakeholders. The ultimate goal of my proposals is refine the management program so that we continue to take the preponderance of the quota during the summertime period—when the fish are nearshore, available to most permit holders, and generally are most valuable—but retain some quota,

and devalue the permit. Moreover, there was little interest in protecting quota for September given the low ex-vessel price and declining weather conditions. The mobile gear fleet also objected because they felt it would pit industry against each other in the future and could result in this fishery moving towards IFQ management, which is not traditionally supported.

as we historically have, for the offshore fishery and to ensure quota is available to accommodate bycatch retention by draggers when they target other species during the summer and early fall south and west of Cape Cod (e.g., horseshoe crabs). In doing so, I expect the program will also address interests from MFAC members to provide quota access to the expanding late-summer rod and reel fishery on Nantucket Shoals.

Period I Management

While the recent industry meeting focused on the Period II Summertime fishery, I am setting forth several proposals affecting the Period I fishery that occurs during the wintertime offshore. These proposals are designed to rethink how this quota is consumed and how much quota should be allocated to the offshore fleet.

First, I want to slow the quota consumption rate during Period I to achieve a longer season and limit the risk that we run an overage of the period's 30% allocation. A trip limit reduction will help achieve this goal. Accordingly, for 2025, I intend to immediately initiate the in-season adjustment process to reduce the trip limit for the coming year from 5,000 pounds to as low as 2,000 pounds; following a two-week written comment period, I will return to the MFAC with a final recommendation at your December business meeting allowing an action to be taken for January 1, 2025. Additionally, I am also proposing to proceed to public hearing to take comment on adopting this lower limit as a regulation for 2026 and beyond. Note that this year, the Period I quota allocation was taken in about five weeks and Rhode Island—a state that has more than double our quota—has a weekly wintertime aggregate limit of 4,000 pounds.

In 2020, the northeast states (MA–NY) agreed to allow vessels who hold fluke landing permits in multiple states to possess non-conforming quantities of summer flounder when offloading a state's limit provided fish destined for each state are segregated and clearly labeled and the limit for each state is not exceeded. This program reflects the fact that the wintertime is a federal waters fishery, there is no federal trip limit, and participants are generally permitted in multiple jurisdictions. While this program may have been reasonable when quota levels were substantially higher, I am uncertain it remains warranted. I am also particularly troubled by the lack of permitting reciprocity involved in this program, as Massachusetts vessels generally have less access to land fluke in our neighboring states than they have here. Accordingly, I want to use the in-season adjustment public comment process to review the interest in reauthorizing this program for 2025. Additionally, and similar to the trip limit proposal above, I will also propose at public hearing to potentially eliminate this authorization in 2026 and beyond.

Lastly, I have decided to take comment on potentially reducing the Period I quota allocation from 30% to as low as 15%. Given the late timing, and the fact that quota allocations cannot be adjusted through an in-season adjustment, the existing 30% allocation will remain in effect for 2025 and any change to the allocation would be made for 2026 (or thereafter). My thinking here is that this fish is of greater value during the summer period and the Commonwealth's seafood industry would be better served by having greater access to this quota during the Period II Summertime fishery. Moreover, should the Period II Summertime fishery not be able to take the available quota before September 30, it would then be made available during the Period II Fall fishery, which is generally the same fleet that targets the fish offshore during Period I.

Period II Summertime Fishery Management

In response to concerns about effort, quota usage, and maintaining some quota availability into the early-fall, I have developed a three-pronged proposal.

The first prong of this approach is to drop the initial trip limit from 600 pounds to 500 pounds for net fishers and 400 pounds to 325 pounds for hook fishers. While not all vessels land up to the trip limit,

particularly in the hook fishery, this should slow landings in aggregate (Figure 4). However, this modest trip limit reduction will continue to allow fishers substantial access to the quota during the early part of the summer season when price is generally higher (Figure 3). I anticipate the proposed cut will not erode the profitability of the fishery and lead to the Commonwealth underutilizing the available quota.

The second prong of this proposal is to tweak the initial quota-use based trip limit reduction trigger in two ways. First, move the use-by date back from August 1 to August 15. This is a lesson learned from this past year, whereby had the use-by date been even several days later we would have triggered a trip limit reduction and likely extended the season into early September. I think an August 15 use-by date also finds the sweet spot in the calendar that balances the interest of extending the quota into September with the desire to ensure the summertime fishery can access the quota. The second aspect of this proposal is to correct the trip limits that are triggered at this quota use threshold. The net trip limit will remain 400 pounds, but the hook trip limit will be increased from 200 pounds to 250 pounds. The trip limit for the hook fishery has historically been approximately two-thirds of that afforded to the net fishery and it was an oversight to establish this trip limit at 200 pounds last year. I now seek to correct this for the coming year. I am not proposing to amend the percent quota use figure as I think 75% is an appropriate threshold at which we can slow landings and balance the interest of taking the quota when the ex-vessel value is traditionally elevated and extending the quota into later in the season (particularly if we adopt a late-season trip limit trigger like that described below). If there is interest in taking a more conservative approach than what is proposed, I'd favor reducing the trip limits at this trigger to 300 pounds for nets and 200 pounds for hook and line.

The third and final prong of this proposal is to adopt a late-season trip limit trigger so that should 90% of the quota be taken on or before September 1, the trip limit for all gear types is reduced to no higher than 200 pounds. This should allow the dragger fleet to continue to retain a bycatch of summer flounder when fishing for other species, namely horseshoe crab. It should also allow for continued directed hook and line catch, particularly as the fish hold on Nantucket Shoals later into the season. Note that 10% of the 2025 quota is roughly 60,000 pounds, and such a set-aside would accommodate about 300 trips at a 200-pound trip limit.

At the recent public scoping meeting, there was a discussion about adding back in closed fishing days. As discussed above, there was limited support for it given the flexibility it provides fishery participants to pick and choose their fishing days. However, I believe it remains a viable mechanism to slow quota consumption. Additionally, we have heard some concerns from the recreational fleet about dragger effort on the weekends and I'd like to give this sector a more robust opportunity to state their concerns for our collective consideration. For these reasons, the public hearing notice will also consider comment on adopting weekend closed fishing days.

Lastly, despite the concerns raised about the multi-day program, I continue to view it as critical to the success of the inshore fishery. Comments from seafood dealers regarding servicing ports were particularly persuasive given longstanding concerns around the erosion of shoreline infrastructure for the commercial fishing industry on Cape Cod. Accordingly, I intend to continue this program. However, I recognize that industry has some legitimate concerns surrounding how this program operated in 2024, and I am willing to consider any suggestions they may have about how the program can be improved. Areas of particular interest is how to improve accountability, whether the tagging requirement is unnecessarily onerous, and if the program should be discontinued once we reach a certain threshold of quota use (e.g., the proposed bycatch trigger at 90% by September 1).

Enclosed:

November 4, 2024 Industry Meeting Presentation

Figure 1. Summer Flounder Fishery Performance and Quota Utilization (2019 – 2024). Data Source: SAFIS eDR, as of October 2024

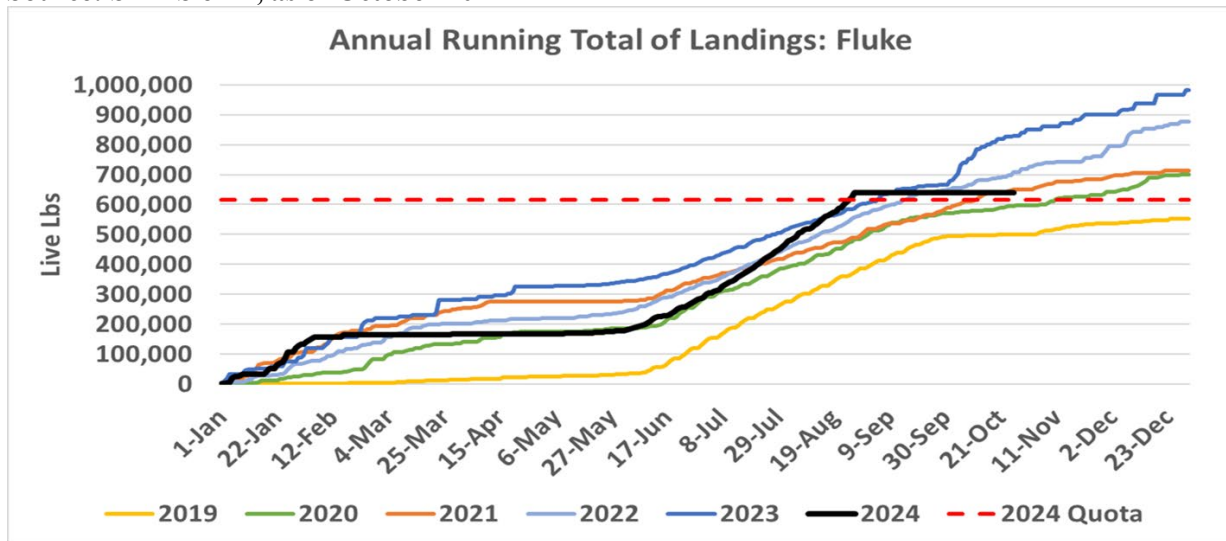


Figure 2. Summer Flounder Cumulative Annual Ex-Vessel Value (2019 – 2024). Data Source: SAFIS eDR, as of October 2024

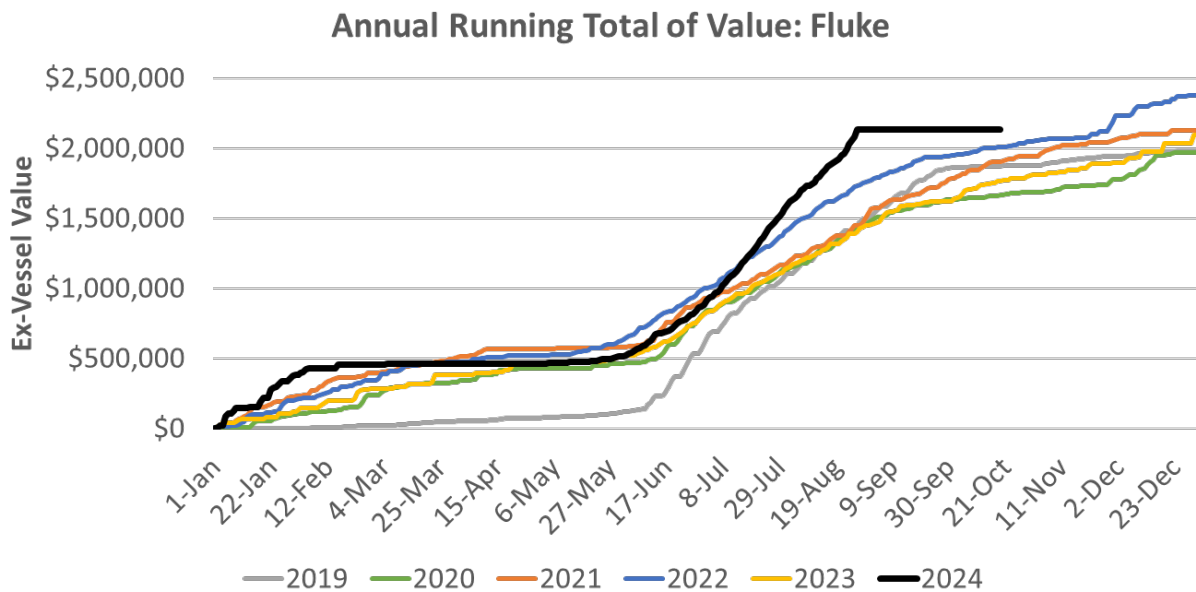


Figure 3. Daily Landings and Average Price (2021 – 2024). Data Source: SAFIS eDR, as of October 2024

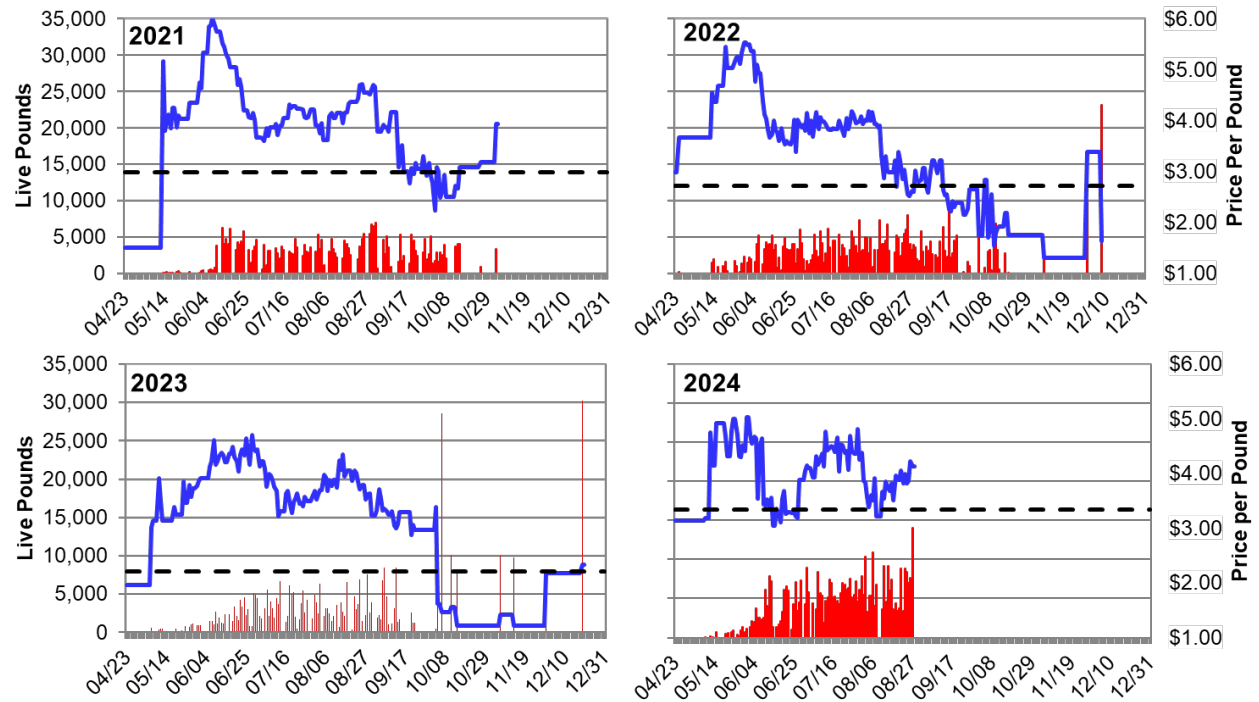


Figure 4. June – September State Waters Pounds per Trip Frequencies (2018 – 2023). Data Source: Massachusetts trip-level reports and GARFO federal vessel trip reports, as of October 2024

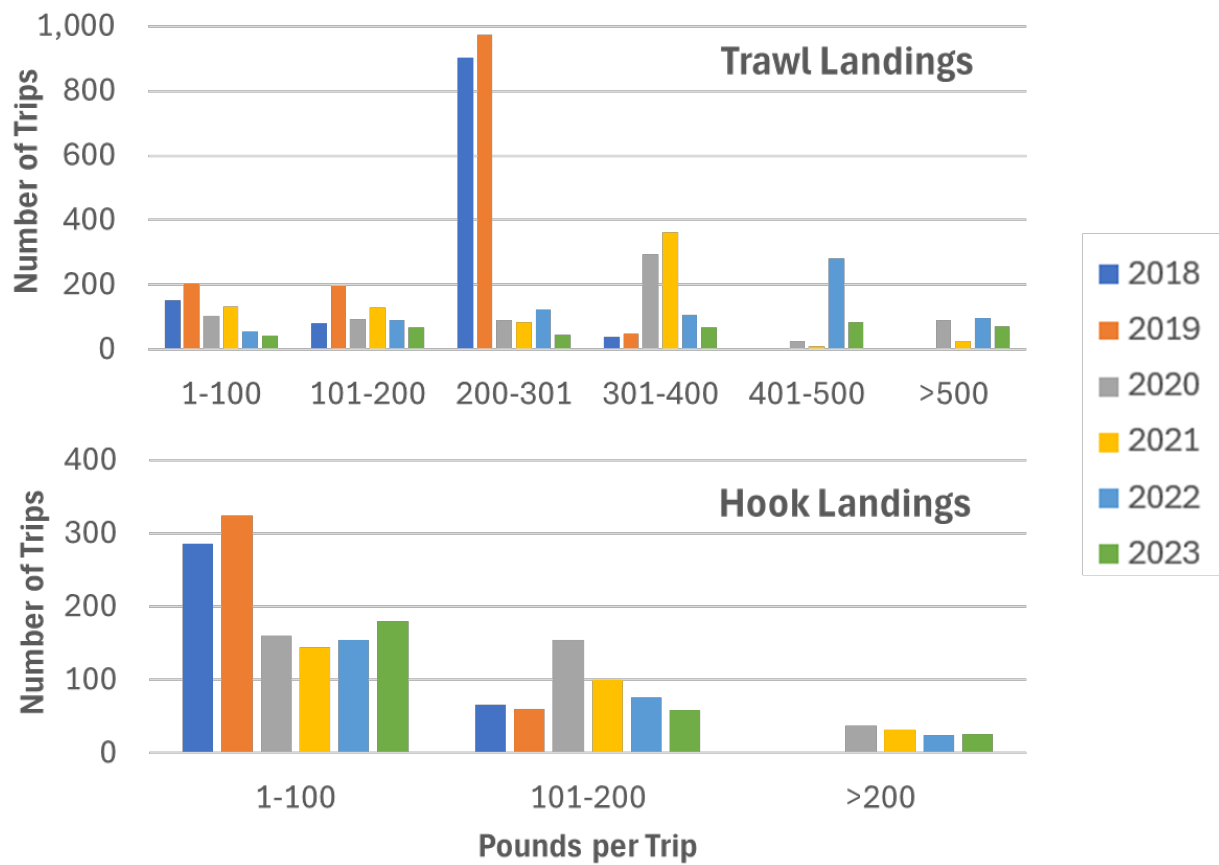


Table 1. 2024 Commercial Summer Flounder Measures with Proposed Revisions for Public Hearing

Fishery Period	Season	Quota Allocation	Open Days	Trip Limits	Min Size
Period I (Winter)	Jan 1 – Apr 22	30% overall for 2025 . 15% overall for 2026 and beyond	Sun - Sat	5,000 2,000 pounds reduced to 100 pounds once 30% of quota use is projected. Authorize possession of non-conforming quantities of fish destined for sale in another state.	14"
Period II (Summer)	Apr 23 – Sep 30	70% overall plus any Period I underage for 2025 85% overall plus any Period I underage for 2026 and beyond .	Sun – Sat Option to close weekend days.	600 500 pounds for nets and 400 325 pounds for hooks. If 75% of quota is taken on or before Aug 1 Aug 15 , then 400 pounds for nets and 250 200 pounds for hooks. If at least 20% of the quota remains on September 1, then 800 pounds for all gears. If 90% of quota is taken on or before September 1, then 200 pounds for all gears.	14"
Period II (Fall)	Oct 1 – Dec 31	Any quota remaining	Sun - Sat	5,000 pounds if more than 10% of the quota remains on October 1. 800 pounds if less than 10% of the quota remains on October 1.	14"

Table 2. Recent Management Revisions for Summer Flounder Program (2018 – 2024). Bold black text denotes regulatory change from prior year. Bold red text denotes in-season adjustment. Blue text denotes a pilot program.

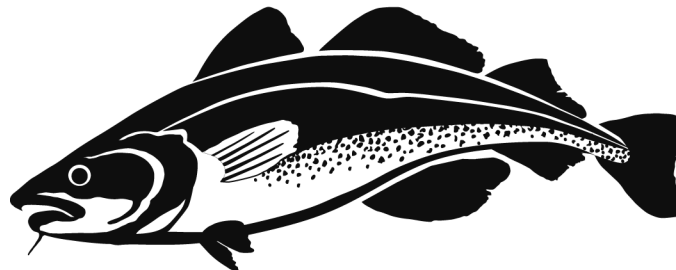
Year	Period	Allocation	Season	Trip Limits	Fishing Days	Size Limit
2018	Period I	Up to 30%	Jan 1 – Apr 22	500 pounds all gears, reduced to 100 pounds at 25% of quota	Sun – Sat	14"
	Period II	70% plus any underage	Apr 23 – Jun 9	100 pounds for nets, closed to hooks.	Sun – Sat	
			June 10 – Quota	300 pounds for nets, 200 pounds for hooks.	Sun - Thu	
2019	Period I	Up to 30%	Jan 1 – Apr 22	500 pounds all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 25% of quota	Sun – Sat	14"
	Period II	70% plus any underage	Apr 23 – Jun 9	100 pounds for nets, closed to hooks.	Sun – Sat	
			June 10 – Dec 31 Jun 10 - Oct 31	300 pounds for nets, 200 pounds for hooks. Multi-day program for draggers initiated Aug 27.	Sun – Thu	
			Nov 1 – Dec 31	1,000 pounds all gears	Sun-Sat	
2020	Period I	Up to 30%	Jan 1 – Apr 22	1,000 pounds all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 25% of quota. Multi-state program initiated on January 1.	Sun – Sat	14"
	Period II	70% plus any underage	Apr 23 – Jun 9	100 pounds for nets, closed to hooks.	Sun – Sat	
			Jun 10 – Dec 31 Jun 10 - Aug 22	400 pounds for nets, 250 pounds for hooks. Multi-day program for draggers renewed.	Sun - Thu	
			Aug 23 – Oct 3	600 pounds for nets , 200 pounds for hooks	Sun – Thu	
			Oct 4 – Oct 31	1,000 pounds all gears	Sun - Sat	
			Nov 1 – Dec 31	1,000 pounds all gears if more than 5% quota remains, 500 pounds for all gears if 5% or less of quota remains. 2,000 pounds all gears	Sun - Sat	
2021	Period I	Up to 30%	Jan 1 – Apr 22	1,000 pounds all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 25% of quota. Multi-state program renewed.	Sun – Sat	14"
	Period II	70% plus any underage	Jun 10 – Oct 31 Jun 10 - Sep 25*	400 pounds for nets, 250 pounds for hooks. Multi-day program for draggers renewed.	Sun - Thu	
			Sep 26 – Oct 9*	800 pounds all gears	Sun – Sat	
			Oct 10 – Oct 31	2,000 pounds all gears	Sun – Sat	
			Nov 1 – Dec 31	2,000 pounds all gears	Sun - Sat	
2022	Period I	Up to 30%	Jan 1 – Apr 22	3,000 pounds all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 30% of quota. Multi-state program renewed.	Sun – Sat	14"
	Period II	70% plus any underage	Apr 23 – Aug 31	500 pounds for nets, 300 pounds for hooks. Multi-day program for draggers renewed.	Sun – Sat	

			Sept 1 – Sept 30	800 pounds for all gears if 20% or more of quota remains. 500 pounds for nets and 300 pounds for hooks if 20% or less of quota remains. Multi-day program for draggers renewed.	Sun - Sat	
			Oct 1 – Dec 31	3,000 pounds for all gears if more than 5% of quota remains; 800 pounds if 5% or less of quota remains. 10,000 pounds for all gears	Sun - Sat	
2023	Period I	Up to 30%	Jan 1 – Apr 22	3,000 pounds for all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 30% of quota 10,000 pounds for all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 30% of quota. Multi-state program renewed.	Sun - Sat	14”
	Period II	70% plus any underage	Apr 23 – Aug 31	600 pounds for nets, 400 pounds for hooks. Multi-day program for draggers renewed.		
			Sept 1 – Sept 30	800 pounds for all gears if 20% or more of quota remains. 500 pounds for nets and 300 pounds for hooks if 20% or less of quota remains. Multi-day program for draggers renewed.		
			Oct 1 – Dec 31	10,000 pounds for all gears if more than 5% of quota remains; 800 pounds if 5% or less of quota remains.		
2024	Period I	Up to 30%	Jan 1 – Apr 22	10,000 pounds for all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 30% of quota 5,000 pounds for all gears reduced to 100 pounds at 30% of quota Multi-state program renewed.	Sun - Sat	14”
	Period II	70% plus any underage	Apr 23 – Sep 30	600 pounds for nets, 400 pounds for hooks. Reduced to 400 pounds for nets and 200 pounds for hooks if 75% of quota is taken on or before August 1. Increased to 800 pounds for all gears if 20% of quota remains on Oct 1. Multi-day program for draggers renewed.		
			Oct 1 – Dec 31	5,000 pounds for all gears if more than 10% of quota remains; 800 pounds if 10% or less of quota remains.		

Industry Meeting on Summer Flounder

November 4, 2024

MarineFisheries
Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Meeting Agenda

1. Review of 2024 Fishery Management and Fishery Performance
2. Initial Industry Feedback and Concerns
3. Potential Management Considerations for 2025 and Beyond
4. Expectations for other Inshore Fisheries in 2025
5. Discussion



2024 Summer Flounder Quota Management

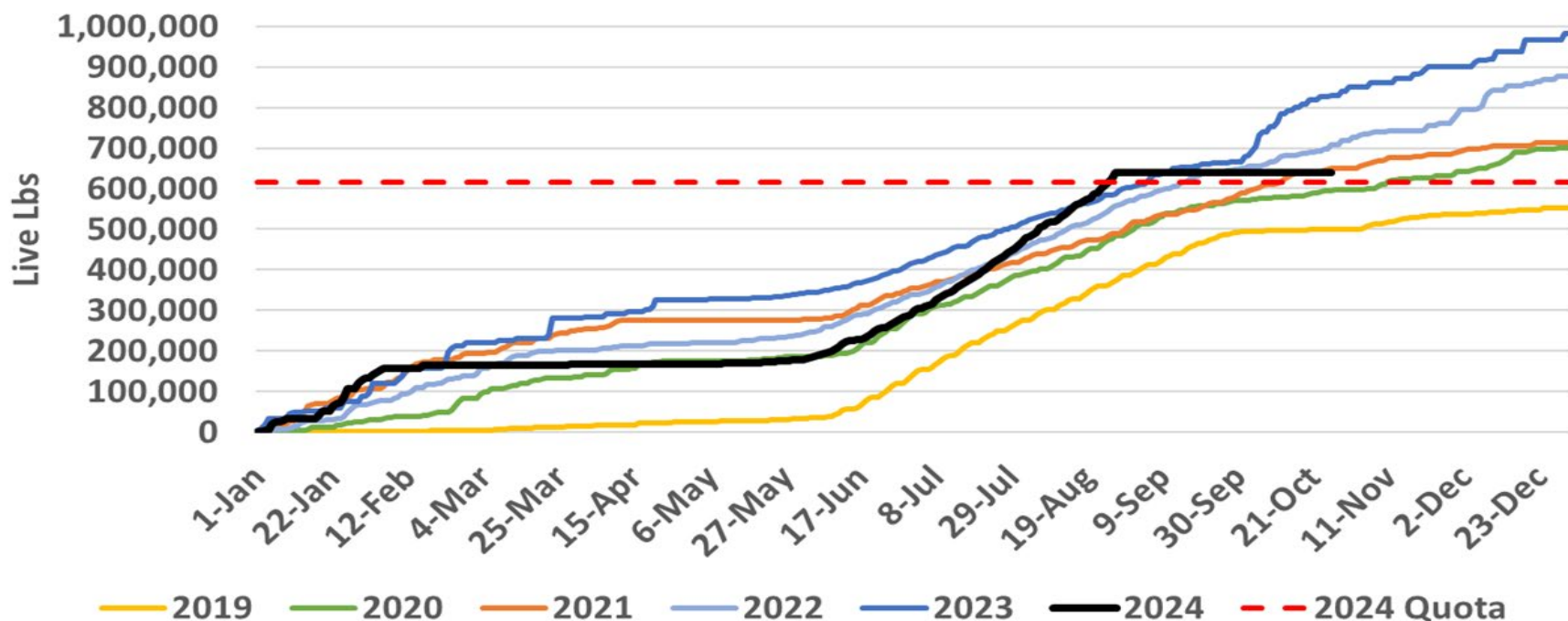
- Quota reduced by 56% reduction from 2023 to 2024 resulting in a 599,507-pound quota.
 - Period I (Jan 1 – Apr 22) allocated 30% (179,852 pounds);
 - Period II (Apr 23 – Dec 31) allocated 70% (419,654 pounds).
- Based on recent performance (2021 – 2023) expectation was:
 - Period I fishery would achieve quota allocation during early winter
 - Period II fishery would take full quota by fall assuming status quo participation in summertime fishery.
- In response, DMF reduced Period I and fall Period II trip limit from 10,000 to 5,000 pounds. Period II limits were not changed, and the Multi-Day Program was renewed.

Period	Gear	Season	Open Days	Trip Limit	Size Limit
Period I	All	Jan 1 – Apr 22	Sun - Sat	5,000 pounds reduced to 100 pounds after 30% quota use	14"
Period II	Nets	Apr 23 – Sept 30	Sun - Sat	600 pounds, reduced to 400 pound if 80% of quota is taken before Aug 1 and increased to 800 pounds if 20% quota remains on Sept 1.	14"
Period II	Hooks	Apr 23 – Sept 30	Sun - Sat	400 pounds, reduced to 250 pound if 80% of quota is taken before Aug 1 and increased to 800 pounds if 20% quota remains on Sept 1.	14"
Period II	All	Oct 1 – Dec 31	Sun – Sat	800 pounds, increased to 5,000 pounds if 20% of quota remains on October 1.	14"



2024 Summer Flounder Fishery Performance

Annual Running Total of Landings: Fluke



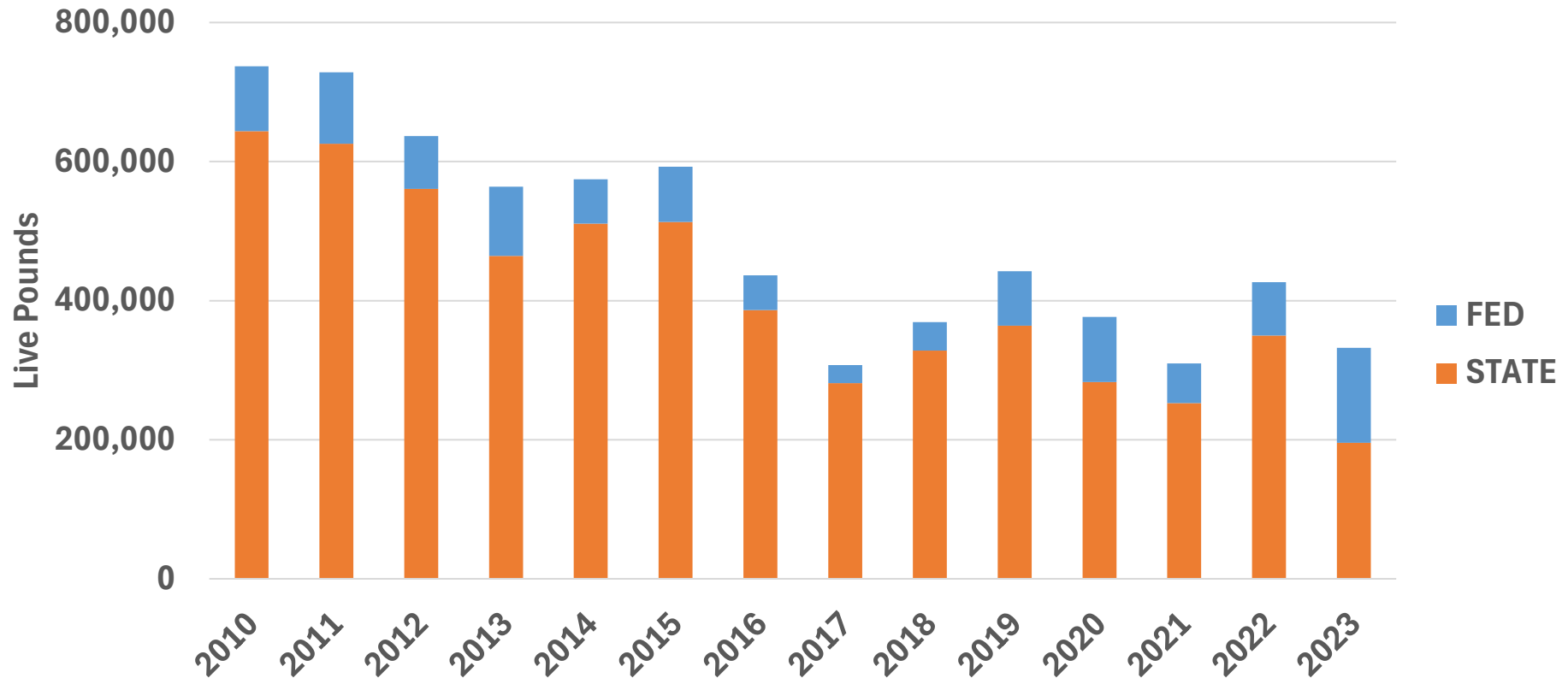
2024 Fishery Performance Overview:

- DMF projected Period I allocation (30%) would be taken on Feb 5 and reduced trip limit to 100 pounds.
- Final Period I landings came in at 27% of quota (166,830 lbs), leaving 73% of quota for Period II.
- 2024 quota taken on August 27 with closure effective August 28.

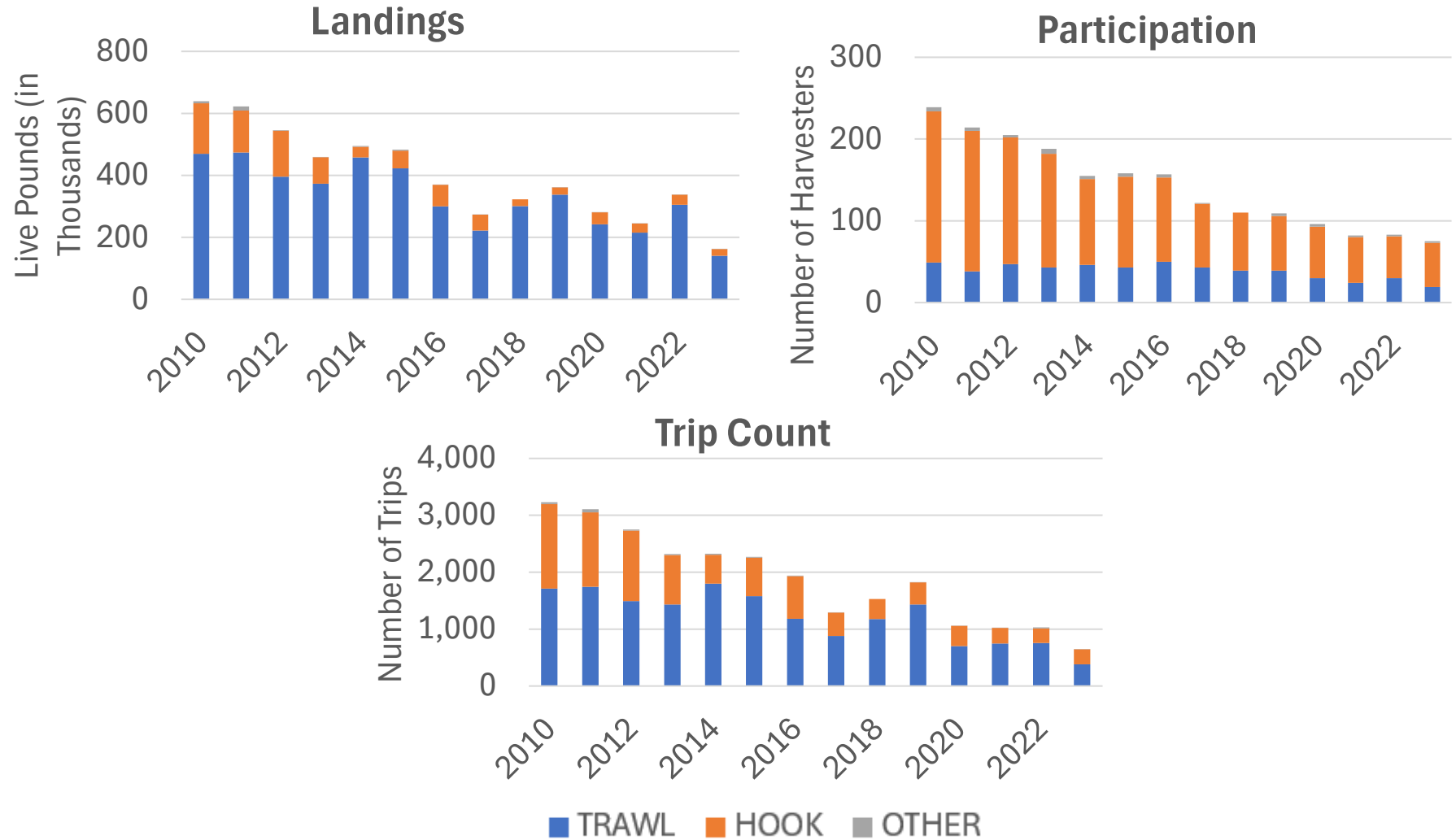
2025 Quota and Management Outlook:

- Quota expected to be around 600,000 pounds again.

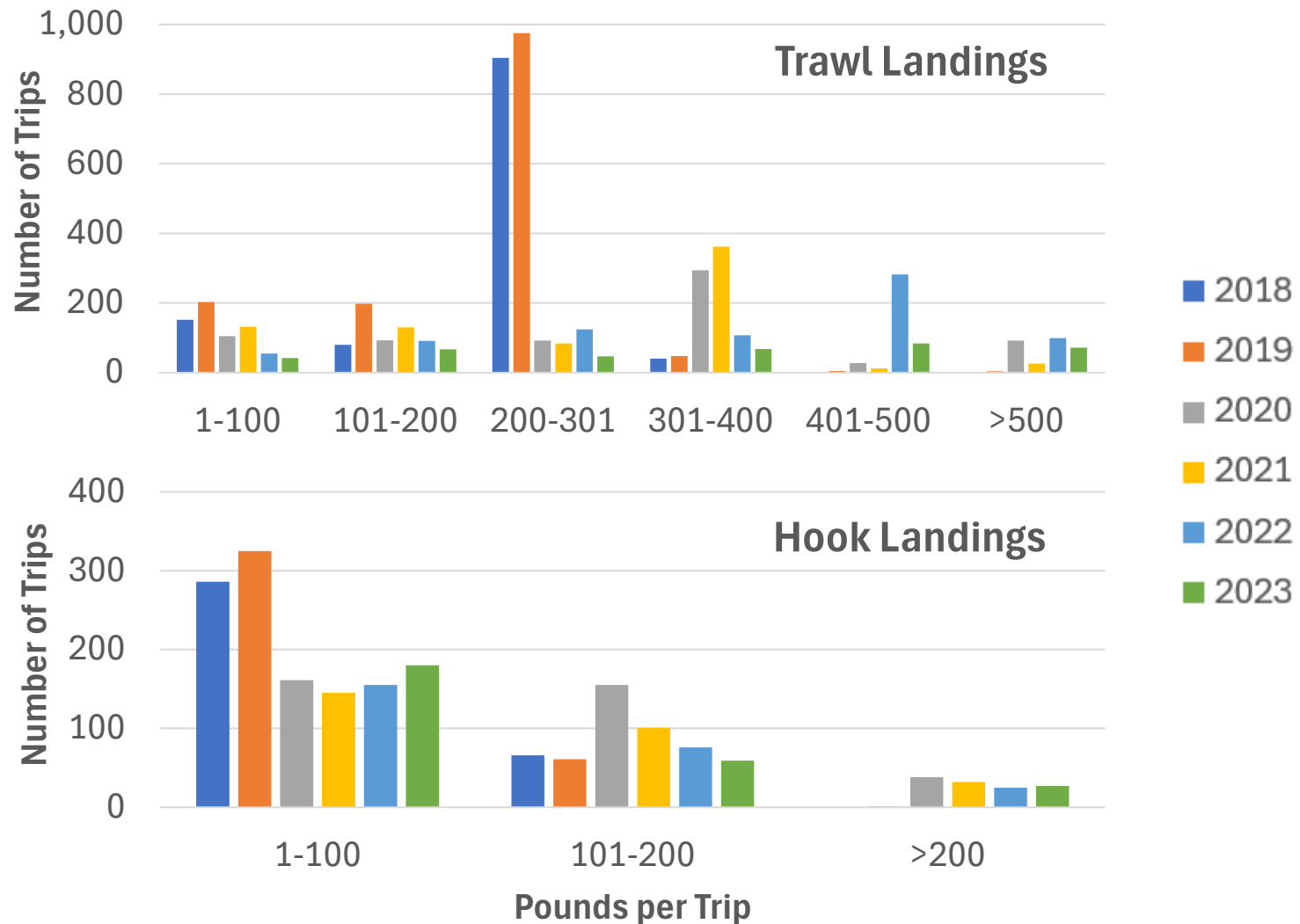
June – September Fluke Landings by Year and Distance from Shore (2010-2023)



June – September State Waters Landings, Participation, and Trip Count by Gear Type (2010-2023)

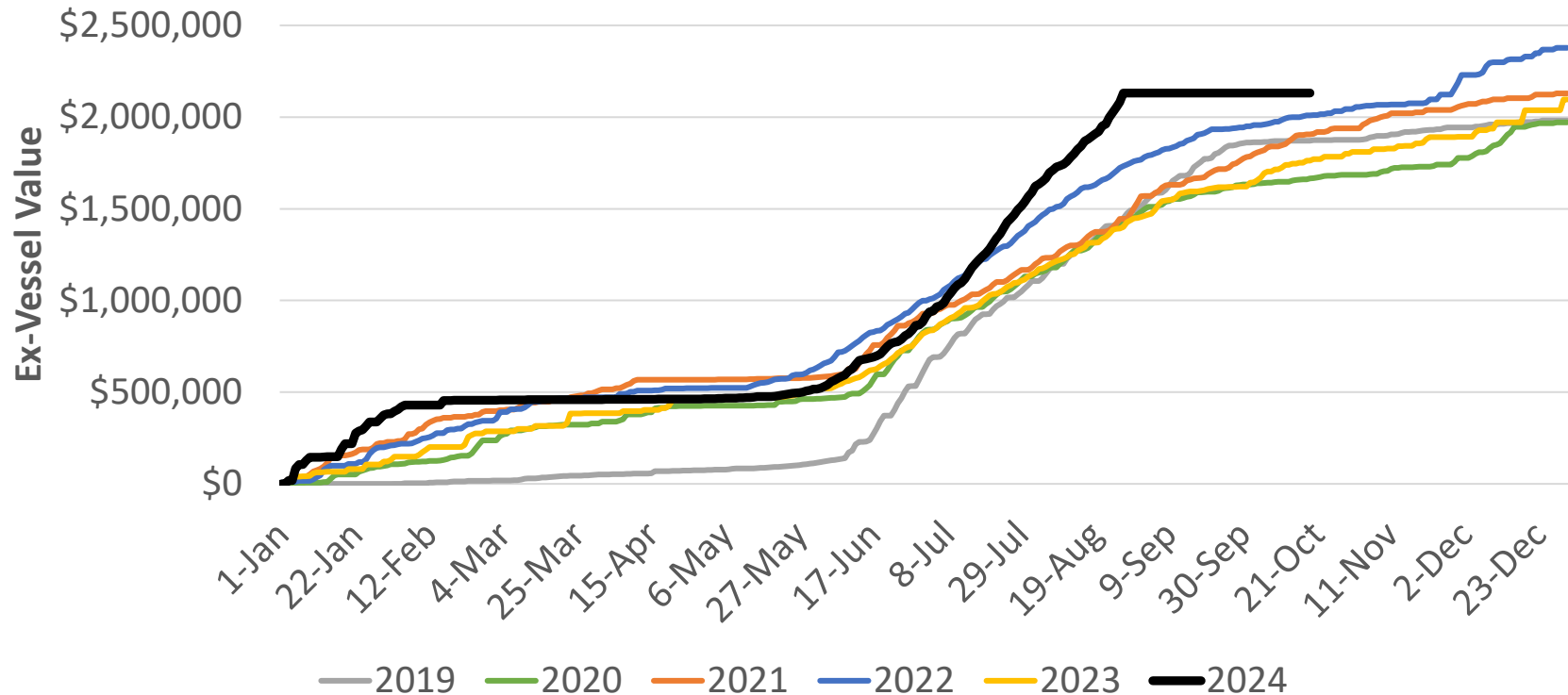


June – September State Waters Pounds per Trip Frequencies (2018-2023)

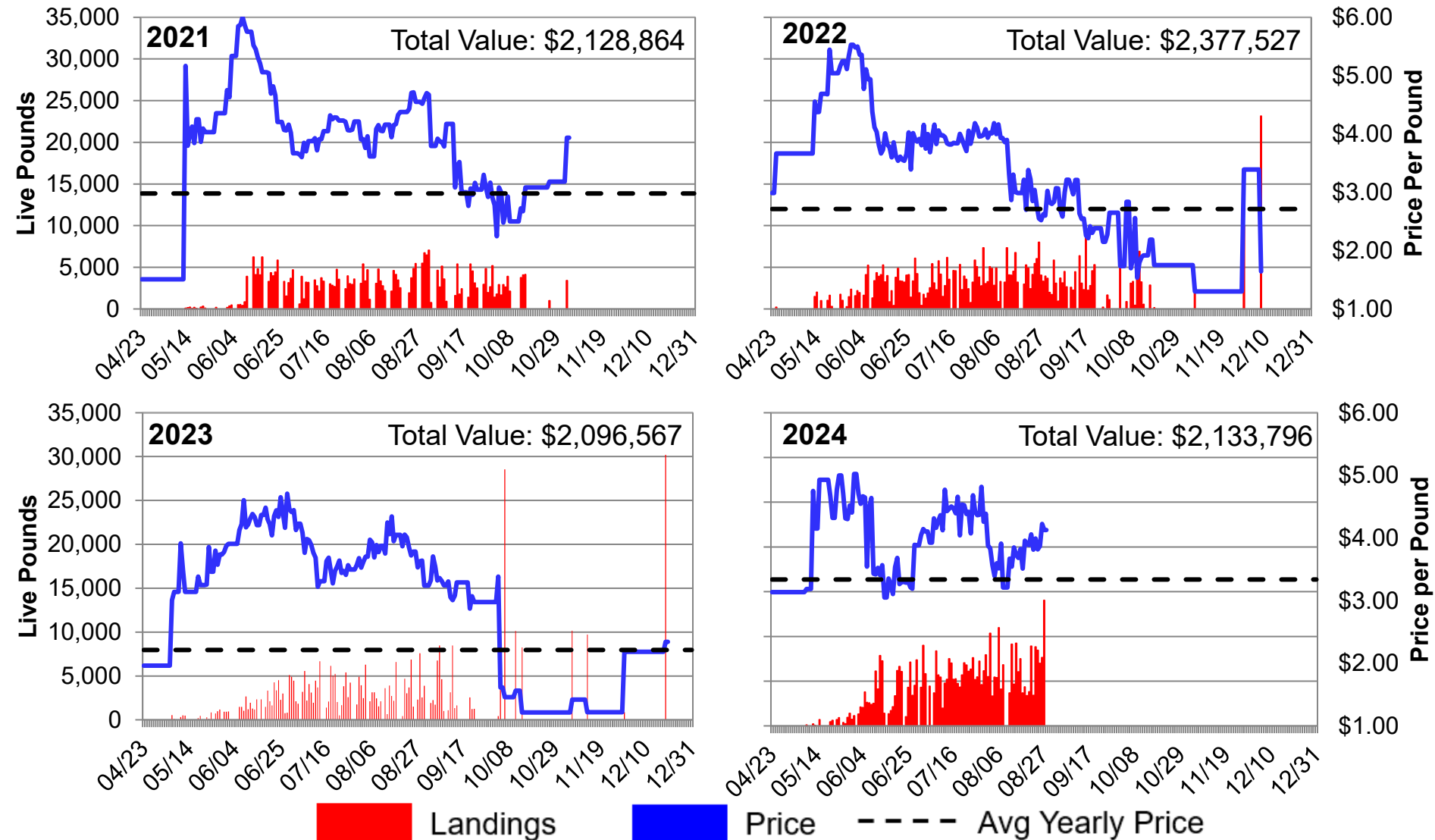


Ex-Vessel Value (2019 – 2024)

Annual Running Total of Value: Fluke



Daily Landings and Average Price (2021-2024)

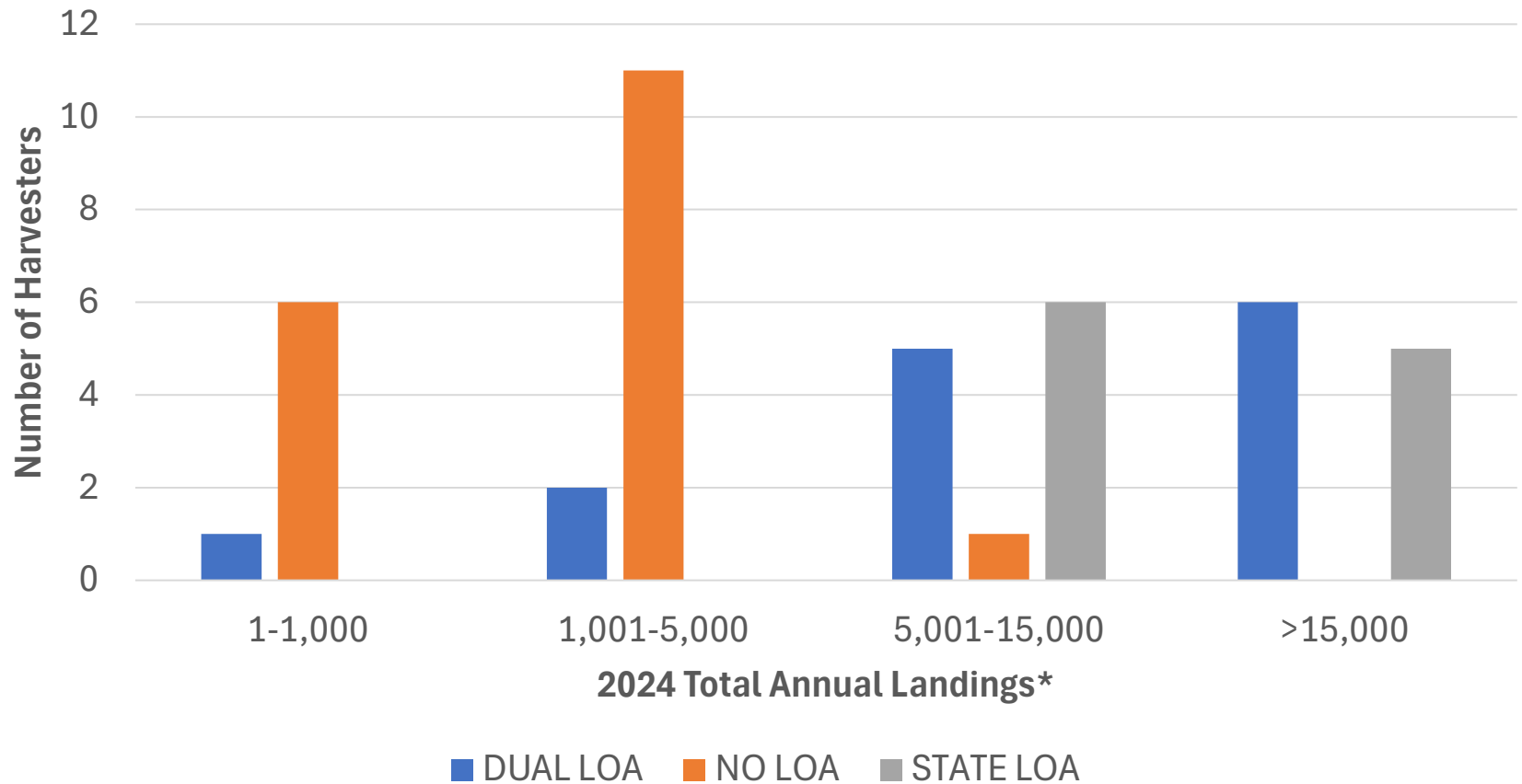


November 4, 2024

Massachusetts Division
of Marine Fisheries



2024 Landings by LOA & Permit Status



*2024 Landings are preliminary and filtered for assumed trawling activity



Competing Industry Perspectives on 2024 Performance

Subject	Support	Objections
Trip Limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allowed for full quota consumption.• Makes fishery profitable for various sized boats.• Allows vessels to target larger fish south and east of islands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourages effort by larger boats resulting in a higher rate of quota use.• Lower limits would allow fishery to stay open later into year.• Concerns about maintaining day-boat fleet.
August 28 Quota Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quota was fully utilized.• From value perspective optimal to take quota in summer.• Fish have decreasing value after September 1.• Allows participants to transition to other fisheries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did not meet management goal of keeping quota available through inshore season.• Quota should be available into Sept to bridge gap to fall fisheries.• Vessels continued to fish for crabs ~7 weeks after closure.• Hook fishery on Nantucket shoals seeks quota availability in Sept.
Multi-Day Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addresses eastwards shift in availability and increasing overhead costs.• Critical to efficient operation.• Most trawlers obtain LOA and many use it at least once.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program has evolved beyond its intended purpose.• Some boats are fishing overnight in federal waters and landing double limit.• Encourages effort in MA fishery resulting in faster rate of quota use.• Concerns about maintaining day boat fleet.



2025 Summer Flounder Harvest Management Options

Action	Example	Pros	Cons
Status Quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open fishery on Apr 23 600-pound trip limit for nets & 400-pound for hooks. Trip limits decrease to 400/250 pounds if 75% quota use before 8/1. Trip limits increase to 800 if 20% quota remains on 9/1. No closed fishing days. Multi-day program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows fishery to take advantage of generally strong summertime ex-vessel value. Allowed for full quota consumption at optimal price in 2024. If effort decreases, fish will be available into fall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fishery closed earlier than anticipated in 2024. Crab fishery continued for ~7 weeks post summer flounder closure. Early closure caused some frustration.
Adopt Weekend No Fishing Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close fishery on Fridays and Saturdays. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will slow rate of quota consumption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide less flexibility. Likely supported by recreational anglers.
Decrease Trip Limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce trip limits back to 500/300 pounds or 400/250 pounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will slow rate of quota consumption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If effort is not there, may cause underutilization. Will make less profitable on daily basis for some vessels.
Amend Trip Limit Reduction Trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce trip limits to 400/250 pounds if 65% or 70% of quota is used by 8/1. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will allow fishery to start at higher trip limit to take advantage of seasonal value. Will respond to effect of effort on quota consumption. Just missed the current 75% trigger in 2024. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Triggers are imperfect management tools. Could make quota consumption less optimal from value perspective.



2025 Summer Flounder Quota Allocation Options

Action	Example	Pros	Cons
Status Quota Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of annual quota (~420,000 pounds) allocated to P2 fishery. P2 fishery allocation includes any underage from P1. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple seasonal-based approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not allow for more dynamic management based on seasonal and gear specific interests.
Set Aside Quota for September Fishery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create set-aside (e.g., 5-10% quota) for a September fishery. Reduce trip limit to 100-pound limit if quota threshold is hit before Aug 31. Any underage would be available to fall fishery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would allow fishery to start at higher level and would only be triggered based on quota consumption. Would allow fishing to continue into September. Accommodates continued bycatch in summer if threshold is reached. Similar to period approach used in RI. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could reduce momentum and profitability during peak summer fishery. Vessels may opt to leave fishery once threshold is met. Could impact horseshoe crab catch. Fish of less value in September.
Set Aside Quota for September Hook Fishery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create set-aside for a for a late-summer hook only fishery (e.g., <5% quota). Any underage would be available to fall fishery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would accommodate interests of Nantucket Shoals hook fishers. Would only be triggered based on quota use. Trawlers would continue to access most of the quota. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would be allocative. Fish is of less value in September. Does not address dragger interests in a September fishery.
Consider Sub-Quotas on Gear Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt P2 net and hook quota allocations based on historic use (e.g., 90/10) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would allow for discrete management of each gear type. Would allow DMF to manage each gear type to different objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would be allocative. Hook fishery is less active now. Dealer reporting used for quota monitoring and gear . Would require 100% electronic daily reporting. Challenging for DMF to monitor/manage.



2025 Summer Flounder Multi-Day Program Options

Action	Example	Pros	Cons
Maintain Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authorize Pilot Program beginning on 5/1/25. Allow multi-day landings of summer flounder, black sea bass, whelk, and horseshoe crabs. No more than one trip limit to be taken per calendar day. Fish to be tagged and segregated. Horseshoe crabs to be labeled and segregated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program has been successful in making certain operations more efficient. Program has allowed vessels to follow fish eastward without substantially increasing overhead costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program has evolved beyond initial purpose. Many participants are federal permit holders fishing in federal waters. May be contributing to high rate of quota use.
Adjust Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require trips landing two daily limits be at sea for at least 24 hours. Monitor program through cellular vessel trackers and electronic reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would make program more accountable. Would bring program back into phase with initial purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns about fisherman safety. Would require investment in tracking tech. Tracking tech may be unwanted. May require more stringent reporting requirements.
Discontinue Program at Quota Trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once 85% quota is used, discontinue multi-day program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would allow use of program at start of season to take advantage of ex-vessel value. Could slow landings later in season to keep quota available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would negatively impact those using the program. Questionable impact on rate of quota consumption.
Eliminate Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not renew program for 2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would likely slow rate of quota consumption. Would make quota available later into season. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would negatively impact those using the program. May result in underutilized quota.



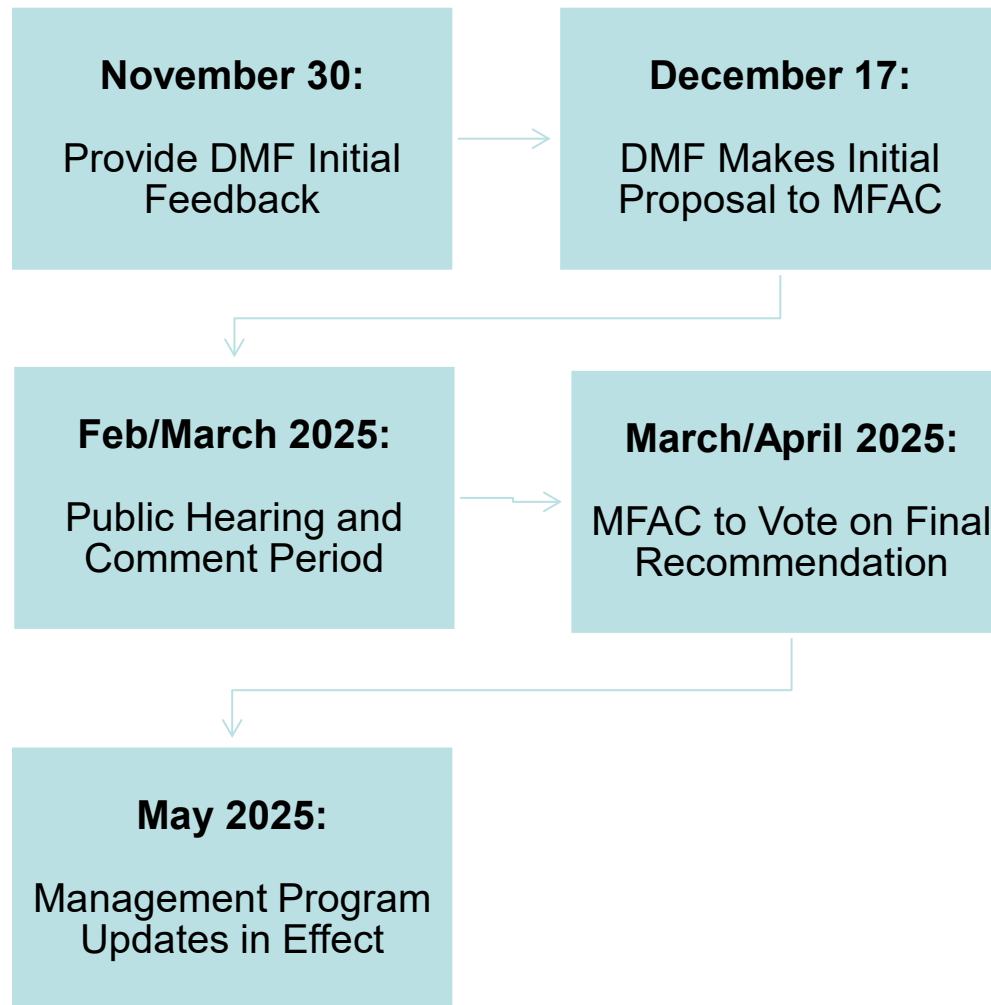
Expectations for Other Inshore Fisheries in 2025

Species	2024 Quota	2024 Landings	Percent Landed	Closure Date	2025 Quota
Bait Horseshoe Crab	140,000 crabs	140,170 crabs	100.0%	10/21/24	140,000 crabs
Biomedical Horseshoe Crab	200,000 crabs	<i>Confidential</i>	<i>Confidential</i>	N/A	200,000 crabs
Scup (May 1 – Sept 30)	1,378,071 pounds*	569,465 pounds	41.3%	N/A	1,642,936 pounds (preliminary)
Black Sea Bass	926,338 pounds	943,925 pounds	101.9%	10/12/24	787,216 pounds (preliminary)

* transfer adjusted quota (400,000 lb to CT)



Timeline Moving Forward



Discussion

- Is there interest in adjusting how this fishery is managed? Or did the fishery perform well enough in 2024?
- Are there harvest control measures that you support? Are there other harvest control measures we should consider?
- Are there quota allocation measures that you support? Are there other quota allocation measures that we can consider?
- Do you want to renew, amend, or scrap the multi-day program?
- Can we better align use of the summer flounder and horseshoe crab quotas?
- Should we require mandating larger mesh (e.g., 10") when targeting crabs after summer flounder is closed?
- Are there other items DMF should consider to improve the management of this fishery?

