



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission December 17, 2024 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the December 17, 2024 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually, and the recording is available on [DMF's YouTube Channel](#). All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

Action Item

Election of MFAC Vice-Chair and Clerk. The MFAC voted unanimously in favor of appointing Bill Doyle to the position of Vice-Chair and Shelley Edmundson to the position of Clerk.

In-Season Adjustment to Decrease 2025 Period I Summer Flounder Commercial Limit. The MFAC voted unanimously in favor of the Director's recommendation to reduce the Period I (January 1 – April 22) summer flounder commercial possession limit from 5,000 pounds to 2,000 pounds for the 2025 season. This was recommended to slow quota use during this period and reduce the risk of an overage of the period's quota allocation reducing the fish available later in the year.

Additionally, DMF informed the MFAC that it would not be reauthorizing the so-called "Multi-State Program" for Period I in 2025. In prior years, this program allowed vessels permitted to land summer flounder 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. DMF's decision to not reauthorize this program is due to concerns about quota utilization rates during the Period I fishery and the limited use of the program by Massachusetts homeported vessels.

Items for Future Public Hearing

False Albacore and Atlantic Bonito Limits. DMF proposed adopting a universal possession limit of five false albacore and Atlantic bonito (combined). This is designed to ameliorate concerns regarding possible unconstrained growth in the harvest of these fish in the absence of federal or interstate fishery management plans and stock assessments. This would limit recreational harvest and constrain the potential development of a commercial fishery. DMF will consider a bycatch exemption for mackerel jigging operations as they may encounter these species during their operations and are not readily able to segregate and discard these fish at harvest. Based on MFAC feedback, DMF also stated it would propose a potential minimum size limit for both species as well.

Constraints on Shore-Based Angling to Limit Interactions with White Sharks. DMF is proposing several measures to limit interactions between shore-based anglers and white sharks to enhance public safety and avoid harm to the sharks. This includes prohibiting shore-based shark fishing along the Massachusetts coastline from the New Hampshire border through Chatham (including all of Monomoy Island), except for the shores inside Plymouth, Kingston, and Duxbury Bays. This area, as well as the waters around the South Cape and the Islands, Mt. Hope Bay, and Buzzards Bay, would be exempt because either white sharks are not frequently observed in these waters or other lawful shore-based shark fishing activities occur there, or both. Shore-based shark fishing would include any angling activity

not occurring on a vessel with a hook that is a size of 8/0 or greater and is attached to a metal leader. This gear specification should exclude nearly all shore-based bluefish and striped bass fishing activity. Additionally, DMF is proposing to prohibit shore-based chumming and the launching of all baits by any means other than casting with a rod and reel (e.g., drones, bait cannons). This is also expected to ameliorate concerns related to the use of mechanized devices to target striped bass, which may increase fight time, stress, and the probability of release mortality.

Recreational Black Sea Bass Season. DMF intends to adjust the timing of the 2025 recreational black sea bass season to maintain a season opening on the third Saturday of May. This will move the start date back one day from May 18 to May 17 and result in a conservationally equivalent adjustment to the season close date, likely moving the close date back by two days from September 3 to September 1.

Controls on Use of Conch Pots in the Federal Zone. Absent a federal fishery management plan for whelks, DMF is proposing to apply all state permitting and regulatory controls affecting the state waters conch pot fishery to Massachusetts permit holders fishing conch pot gear in federal waters. This includes limited entry permitting requirements, trap limits, trap tag requirements, and seasons. The purpose of this action is to limit the unconstrained growth of this fishery in federal waters given the potential entanglement risk this gear poses to large whales and sea turtles, particularly in those waters south and east of Nantucket.

For the time being, DMF will not unilaterally address gear marking and gear modification requirements for fish and conch pot gear set in the federal zone. This gear is to be configured in accordance with the federal rules governing the Other Trap Pot Fisheries in the Northern Nearshore Trap Pot Waters and the use of weak rope is strongly encouraged. However, DMF will work with NOAA Fisheries to develop buoy line marking and modification rules for fish pot and conch pot gear in federal waters to reduce the entanglement risk associated with this gear and adequately distinguish this gear from other state trap and pot fisheries.

Commercial Eel Fishery and Permitting. DMF is proposing to constrain commercial fishing for American eels given coastwide and local concerns about the population and potential underreporting of harvest. This includes an option to place a moratorium on commercial harvest in the Commonwealth. As an alternative, DMF is also proposing to adopt a December 31, 2024 control date on the commercial American eel regulated fishery endorsement, limit entry by restricting issuance of the endorsement in 2026 based on performance criteria prior to the control date, and potentially make the endorsement owner-operator and non-transferable so as to sunset the commercial fishery over time.

Paperwork Requirements for Dogfish. Existing state law prohibits the possession and sale of shark fins with an allowance for local seafood dealers to process smooth and spiny dogfish (collectively, “dogfish”) into dogfish fins and for this product to be possessed and sold in Massachusetts. There is some concern that this has created a loophole to obscure the possession of unlawful shark fins, particularly as shark fin processing techniques may affect genetic testing procedures to confirm species identification. To address this, DMF is proposing that the possession of dogfish fins is illegal unless it is accompanied by paperwork that can confirm the lawful origin of the product.

Discussion Items

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Striped Bass Board Meeting. The ASMFC's Striped Bass Management Board held a special meeting on December 16 to discuss potential responses to the 2024 stock assessment which indicated some uncertainty about the stock staying on its rebuilding trajectory. This included potential Board action to implement additional restrictions for 2025. Ultimately, the Board decided to initiate an addendum to support the rebuilding of striped bass by 2029 to be implemented in 2026. The specifics of this addendum are to be developed in the coming months.

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) Update. DMF staff briefed the MFAC on the December NEFMC meeting. For groundfish, Framework 69 was approved to set commercial groundfish annual catch limits for certain species, including the four new cod stocks. The limits for cod stocks in Fishing Year 2025 are going to be extraordinarily low, resulting in zero retention of Southern New England cod for the Common Pool and recreational fishery. The state-waters sub-component for Western Gulf of Maine Cod is likely sufficient to maintain the commercial state-waters fishery at its current catch level given recent performance. Additionally, the NEFMC adjusted accountability measures related to the harvest of flatfish by the scallop dredge fleet so that they only apply if the total ACL is exceeded. With regards to scallops, DMF reviewed the recent biomass survey, which was the lowest recorded since the 1990s and documented a continued decline in exploitable biomass from 2023 to 2024. Additionally, the NEFMC adopted catch limit specifications for 2025; agreed to set seasonal access area dates to improve scallop yield; and allowed vessels declared into the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) fishery to possess scallops and transit outside the NGOM area (i.e., to ports south of Boston)

Upcoming Meetings. The MFAC meeting for 2025 will be announced in January 2025.