

Commercial Fisheries Commission
Final Business Meeting Minutes
December 12, 2025
836 S Rodney French Blvd, New Bedford, MA

Attendees

Commercial Fisheries Commission: Daniel McKiernan, co-chair; Alison Brizius, co-chair; Edward Barrett; Gordon Carr; Hollie Emery; Vito Giacalone; Jackie Odell; Kevin Stokesbury; Eric Hansen; Katie Almeida. Virtually: Aubrey Church; Angela Sanfilippo; Beth Casoni. Absent: Roger Berkowitz; Albert Cottone; Pamela LaFreniere, Tim Brady.

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

Office of Coastal Zone Management: Todd Callaghan

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

Consensus Building Institute: Patrick Field; Abby Fullem

Members of the Public: Tim Barrett; Nick Calibres; John Harren; Carlos; Hannah MacDonald. Virtually: Dru Tarr; Ellen Cebula; Jynessa; Lane Johnston; Martellaro; Steve Cadrin; Robert; Lisa; Valerie Nelson; Roger; Monique Combs; Melissa Britsch.

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. Field outlined the meeting's agenda.

Field then asked if there were any requests to amend the October 2025 business meeting minutes. No amendments were sought. **A rollcall vote was conducted, and the minutes were unanimously approved with one abstention (11-0-1).**

Division of Marine Fisheries Update on Fisheries Innovation Fund Announcements

Brad Schondelmeier shared updates on the Massachusetts Fisheries Innovation Fund (FIF) awardees.

The FIF was created in 2020 through an agreement between the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) and Vineyard Wind, creating a \$1.75 million fund to help support fishing practices alongside offshore wind (OSW) development, conduct research on the impact of OSW development on fishery resources, and provide innovation and technology grants to the fishing community. An Advisory Panel (AP)—made up of nine industry members and chaired by Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Director, Dan McKiernan—was developed to create criteria to guide the distribution of the funds.

In reviewing the Request for Proposals (RFP), the AP prioritized projects that would benefit and collaborate with the fishing industry and deemphasized fishery research, for which funds were available elsewhere. The main priorities for the first solicitation were fishing innovation, community, and safety. The RFP closed at the end of August after receiving 20 proposals seeking \$3.37 million in grants. Six projects were accepted with nearly \$1.2 million awarded. This includes three fishing gear development projects (trap gear and mechanical jigging) to expand fishing opportunities around wind arrays and build fleet resiliency; two community projects to promote local seafood and enhance seafood marketing; and one safety project to evaluate potential hazards related to towing over cable protection mattresses.

Projects will start as early as January 1, 2026 and will report final results in 2027. Future solicitations will be discussed and refined with the AP. Schondelmeier thanked all applicants, EEA grant management staff, application reviewers, and DMF staff for their support.

Ed Barrett voiced concern about awardees based in Rhode Island and asked about prioritizing Massachusetts applicants in future solicitations. Schondelmeier explained that the AP decided to prioritize projects with greatest impact and knowledge gained for Commonwealth fishers, rather than limiting eligibility to Massachusetts-based applicants. Further, the non-resident-based projects are in collaboration with Massachusetts fishers.

Jackie Odell asked about the use of cable mattresses in Southern New England. Schondelmeier, Odell, and Barrett discussed the locations of mattresses in this region and the importance of studying any risks they pose to fishers.

Pat Field and Schondelmeier then discussed potential means for fisher compensation due to gear loss attributable to cable mattresses.

Focus Group Updates

Port Profile Project

Story Reed shared an update on the Port Profile Project Focus Group. The survey targeting commercial and for-hire fishers was distributed and received 560 responses, a significant improvement from previous surveys. The harbormaster survey has received responses from 2/3 of harbormasters and outreach is on-going. DMF's Statistics Program is working on analyzing results and will release the report in spring 2026. The focus group may meet in the interim if there are additional questions to address.

Barrett and Reed discussed the composition of survey respondents across fisheries or gear types. Reed explained that this information will be examined as part of the analysis.

Flounder Processing

Reed then provided updates on the Flounder Processing Focus Group. Members include Al Cottone, Roger Berkowitz, Sefatia Romeo-Theken, Frank Mirarchi, and DMF staff. The group met for the first time in early December. The meeting focused on tasks assessing seafood processor needs and bolstering DMF's seafood marketing. There was also some discussion about continuing the push to expand SNAP benefit acceptance in seafood retailers.

Angela Sanfilippo emphasized the importance of public outreach and education to expand local seafood markets. Reed noted that Sanfilippo is welcome to join future focus group meetings to discuss marketing ideas further.

Odell asked how the state tracks markets and value, noting the recent drop in grey sole price. Reed explained that DMF tracks ex-vessel prices throughout the season and year over year, which may provide some insight into what causes these drops in value. However, value varies across species and can be difficult to predict. Odell, Reed, and Barrett discussed data sources for this information and potential applications.

Vito Giacalone explained how ex-vessel value is determined and outlined examples of market volatility of grey sole in recent weeks. He suggested potential solutions to maintain market stability, such as incorporating end markets to set the price.

A member of the public remarked on the Food Security Infrastructure Grants (FSIG) program through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) being geared more towards agriculture than fishing. Reed responded that DMF advocates for increased opportunities for the seafood industry through FSIG, and this can be discussed more deeply with the focus group.

Barrett asked to discuss the FSIG program in more detail at a future CFC meeting. Field took note.

Offshore Wind

Katie Almeida and Brad Schondelmeier provided updates from the CFC's Focus Group on OSW. Almeida highlighted the primary objectives of the focus group: (1) develop methods to track effects of OSW development on fishing to inform more effective OSW development in the future; (2) collaborate across stakeholders to gain better understanding of fishing behavior early in OSW development; (3) increase consistency of AIS applications across arrays; (4) develop a statewide strategy for the coexistence of OSW development and commercial fisheries; and (5) improve economic and compensatory mitigation analysis. Almeida and Schondelmeier then spoke on the goals of each objective.

Eric Hansen asked to clarify how AIS best practices would impact map visualization. Schondelmeier noted that turbines are visible on a plotter and through radar but would not necessarily have AIS. Hansen and Schondelmeier discussed the potential impact of clutter on visualization. Schondelmeier encouraged the CFC to provide feedback or voice any concerns on this topic, as developers are willing to accommodate needs.

Almeida added that an industry task force through Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA) created a report recommending aids in navigation within OSW arrays. Schondelmeier noted that RODA's report inspired this effort.

Kevin Stokesbury, Hansen, and Schondelmeier discussed how increased AIS consistency would benefit both fishing and transit activity.

Discussion of Future Commercial Fishing Industry Briefing for Executive Office of Economic Development

Abby Fullem introduced the CFC's discussion on briefing the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) on the commercial fishing industry. A presentation from the CFC to the EOED was postponed, allowing the CFC to flesh out potential topics to discuss.

Gordon Carr spoke on the value of the CFC to be able to speak on the significant impact of the commercial fishing industry and advocate for development support. Beyond locally caught seafood, the value of seafood imported and processed in Massachusetts is significant. Carr added that clear data to quantify seafood value by

species and port would be valuable to advocate for the inclusion of the commercial fishing industry in future state economic development plans.

Dan McKiernan echoed Carr's point on Massachusetts being a seafood hub and the scale of seafood transported into and through Massachusetts for further processing and distribution. McKiernan and Story Reed then discussed the current data available on the economic value of seafood processing by port. Reed noted that data on commercial fishing industry jobs is collected; however, estimating economic value of seafood processing from this information would be challenging. Carr added that certain accessory jobs, such as ship maintenance, may be missed through this approach. Dan noted that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Economic Branch may already collect this data.

Aubrey Church suggested additional data sources, such as DMF's previous Port Profile Project, the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program, and DMF's Statistics Program.

Church then introduced several areas of potential economic development within the commercial fishing industry that the CFC could pursue EOED support for. These included supporting working waterfronts, establishing a low-interest rate loan program for independent owner-operators, building grant programs dedicated to supporting local fishing industry research, establishing practices to streamline regulations and permitting, and prioritizing grants to help train future generations of fishermen and expand seafood marketing.

Jackie Odell suggested presenting updates on the commercial fishing industry by port or by fishery to exemplify the unique needs across the industry. Field noted that this could be done while building a cohesive case for the commercial fishing industry. Odell agreed.

Barrett remarked on the importance of acknowledging how quickly industry needs and circumstances shift.

Dan suggested advocating for continued or expanded funding for DMF's Seafood Marketing Program, which is funded through an earmark from Senator Bruce Tarr.

Fullem noted that ideas may be appropriate to include in the annual report as well as share with the EOED. She suggested convening a focus group to discuss this further. Aubrey Church, Jackie Odell, Angela Sanfilippo, Gordon Carr, Ed Barrett, Vito Giacalone, and Beth Casoni volunteered.

Working Waterfront Opportunities

Pat Field introduced presentations to explore Maine's approach to supporting small working waterfronts (WWF), especially in response to recent years' storm damage.

Maine Working Waterfront Initiative

Melissa Britsch of the Maine Coastal Program shared a presentation on Maine WWF grant and support opportunities. Britsch started by outlining Maine's WWFs and their diversity in size, amenities, and ownership. Availability of funding opportunities depends on whether the WWF is publicly or privately owned, and privately owned ports face more limitations to funding. While the Maine Coastal Program aims to catalogue the state's WWFs, this is an on-going process and is made challenging by the very small size of some ports.

Britsch shared on-going and one-time state grant opportunities for WWFs. She highlighted WWF Resilience Grants, which helped support WWFs after storms, and the Maine Infrastructure Adaptation Fund, which will support climate adaptation in WWFs.

Permanent protections to prevent the conversion of WWFs into commercial or recreational spaces include the Working Waterfront Access Protection Program, which uses covenants to protect WWFs regardless of ownership.

Maine is in the process of establishing a Working Waterfront Advisory Council to track and advise legislature on WWF solutions, which will further support this work. Britsch noted that several aspects of these efforts may be replicable across states, including planning grants, engineering and permitting support, construction funding, and permanent protections.

Vito Giacalone expressed interest in this work and recognized the value of Designated Port Areas (DPAs) in Massachusetts. However, he noted that funding is limited to support DPAs and additional funding sources may be appropriate to enhance and protect DPAs and working waterfronts more generally.

Commissioner O'Shea and Giacalone discussed the potential application of revolving loans to support DPAs and WWFs. The Commissioner, Field, and Britsch then discussed Maine's Working Waterfront Access Protection Program in more detail.

Sefatia Romeo-Theken remarked on the use of revolving loan funds to support fishermen in the past. These should be examined before creating new processes for WWFs.

Ed Barrett discussed the rapidly increasing economic pressure on WWFs and ports. Barrett asked for more information on Chapter 91 permits. Director Brizius and Barrett

discussed how this can be explored more deeply at future CFC meetings. Field summarized areas of interest for the CFC, including non-DPA ports, reexamining Chapter 91, and supporting private properties.

Maine Coast Fishermen Working Waterfront Efforts

Monique Coombs of Maine Coast Fishermen Association presented on challenges facing Maine WWFs and how they are working to support them.

Coombs acknowledged Barrett's earlier comment on limited mooring availability and hoped this can be better understood through port inventory.

Coombs then shared a comprehensive report of Maine's WWFs that revealed the diversity of port needs and vulnerabilities across the state. Small ports are particularly vulnerable to storm events and challenges in receiving funding.

Certain outreach materials, such as WWF guides, have been successful in supporting WWF communities. As municipalities have more significant power in Maine than the Commonwealth, Right to Fish policies are used by municipalities to protect WWFs from nuisance complaints. The efforts help prioritize WWF and their role in local communities.

Coombs then spoke on the impact of severe storms on WWFs and lessons learned, such as the role of grants in helping to rebuild WWFs and the nuances of flood insurance facing these properties. The Maine Coast Fishermen Association now aims to catalogue WWFs in Maine and inventory their needs and challenges.

Gordon Carr and Coombs discussed the importance of inventorying WWFs ahead of potential initiatives led by Congress to better support port infrastructure and development.

CFC Annual Report

Pat Field outlined expectations and next steps for the CFC's annual report. The CFC will develop a series of recommendations to the Legislature based on deliberations in its first year.

Barrett raised the importance of the CFC transitioning from discussions to action in future years.

Odell suggested including support for defining the meaning of coexistence of OSW and fishing industries. Field reiterated the dynamic between the Fisheries Working Group for Offshore Wind (FWG) and the CFC, allowing the FWG to discuss day-to-day issues

faced, while the CFC can distill recommendations from these issues. Gordon Carr echoed Odell's view, noting potential changes in OSW development in the future and the importance of building this foundation now.

Aubrey Church suggested highlighting focus groups' progress, particularly that of the Port Profile Project. She noted that the discussion with EOED will likely bring about additional action items. Church hoped that the report will show the CFC's interest in commercial fishing issues beyond just OSW. Odell agreed.

Pat Field and Director McKiernan discussed potential focuses for the report. Director McKiernan provided context for funding requests given that DFG and DMF are facing budgetary limitations. Commissioner O'Shea, Director Brizius, Director McKiernan, and Field discussed the Mass Ready Act as a potential funding mechanism. Field, Church, and Director McKiernan then discussed potential additions like exploring revolving funds and evaluating the effectiveness of the Right to Fish across municipalities and its potential applications in Massachusetts.

Sefatia Romeo-Theken volunteered to reach out to Cape Ann legislators to discuss how Revolving loan funds were previously established to support commercial fishing.

Field and Director McKiernan spoke on future funding for CBI and the CFC.

Field, Fullem, Director McKiernan, and Carr discussed the value of additional perspectives from other organizations.

Public Comment

Valerie Nelson emphasized the importance of urgency when submitting requests to the legislature. Nelson advocated for examining WWF needs by port, additional funding for value-added products, and supporting commercial fishing and WWF perspectives in response to potential bills from Congress.

A representative of Mortillaro Lobster emphasized the importance of food supply and food security through supporting small businesses. She noted the limitations of development in DPAs without sufficient funding, the role of Chapter 91 permits, and emphasized the importance of state support. She then suggested examining CZM and DEP's Port Profile Analysis.

CFC members were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments. Ed Barrett voiced concern that SMAST's cod end video survey does not have sufficient funds and he asked the DMF to make these funds available. Dan responded that these funds have been approved by DMF and were released to SMAST. Odell and Giacalone voiced support for this survey.

Barrett then voiced concern that New England Fish Exchange in Boston's fish pier may be converted into a tech firm, underscoring the development threat facing WWFs.

Church added that she was contacted by John Beam to provide insight on depth data in Cape Cod Bay as part of an effort to update nautical charts. Others may be contacted as well. Additionally, December 15 is the deadline to share comments on the Executive Order to Restore Seafood Competitiveness.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.

Upcoming Meetings

March 26, 2026

1 Rabbit Hill Rd, Westborough, MA

Meeting Materials

- CFC December 12, 2025 Business Meeting Agenda
- CFC October 6, 2025 Business Meeting Draft Minutes
- CFC OSW Focus Group Recommendations